

THE VENEER OF MODERNITY:
TOURISM AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION
ON ISLA MARGARITA, VENEZUELA

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

1996

I would like to dedicate this study to working, single mothers, wherever they may be. And, as promised, to the Virgen del Valle.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I suppose that every researcher, when writing up their results of months or years of study, is at one time beset by regrets of what they did not do. They did not get that one interview, or perhaps did not have time to peruse all the archives in whatever the church. And like a thorn embedded in your flesh, this nagging annoyance of what could have been and what could still be never seems to diminish. But in order to present the data, one must eventually come to grips with the inadequacies and put on the face of an optimist and cheerfully say, "Well, at least there is always more work to be done, more questions to be answered!"

This is the feeling I have had ever since I left Isla Margarita in the late summer of 1994. Even staying in contact with Venezuelan friends familiar with my research can be no substitute for learning of events on the island firsthand. Unfortunately, one person cannot physically live in two places at one time. And so there must be, even temporarily, an end to the research and a time to make the best of what you have and begin to write.

There are many, many people who helped me bring this dissertation from its reluctant beginning to its final stage. But there are some who deserve special mention and warm, sincere thanks. They are:

The warm and giving people of Isla Margarita, but especially Omar Salazar, Chico Salazar, Lidia and Chuchú Figueroa, Señora Hilaria, La Negra, and my compadres, Iraima and Cheo Andrade;

Paul Doughty, who has stuck by me for over a decade, and believed I could do all this. He was right;

Josmir Fernandez, who, in her wisdom of a seventeen year old woman, told me, "Mejor andar sola que mal acompañada." If not for that, this dissertation may never have been finished;

Ann Markell, my sister, who lent emotional, financial and intellectual support when I was in desperate need of each, and my brother Jon Kitner, who helped my get back on my feet;

My parents, Joyce and Harold Kitner, to whom I will never be able to adequately thank for everything they have done;

And to Gabriela del Valle Salazar Kitner, my daughter, a Margariteña, who has helped me keep life in perspective throughout this whole ordeal.

I would also like to thank my co-workers in the Law School at the University of Florida, especially Sherry, Ellen, Susan, and my boss, Gail. A very special *abrazo* goes to Wendy Cousino, who was literally a savior at crucial times. My thanks are also due to Phoebe Conta, who made my return to Gainesville more pleasurable than painful; to Tim Aydt and the University of Florida Football Team (1989-1996), to Denzil Weitz, and to La Red de Atarraya and Los Recontracojidos, especially Luís, David, and Nesto, for all their moral support during some difficult times.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support in the form of a grant from the Tinker Foundation and the Center for Latin American Studies to carry out preliminary doctoral research in Venezuela in 1989. Fieldwork was made possible in the form of a Fulbright doctoral dissertation research grant from the Institute for International Education. Institutional affiliation was given by Dra. María Matilde Suárez at the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas in Caracas, and by the Instituto de Antropología, at

La Fundación La Salle through Dr. Werner Wilbert. Logistical support was offered innumerable times by the wonderful and competent staff of La Fundación La Salle, Punta de Piedras, and I will always be indebted to them.

PREFACE

I sat on the back stoop bathed in the softer afternoon sun of the island. Lazily I gazed upon Francisca's *conuco* of bananas, papaya, coconuts, and the cautious and stupid movements of the chickens pecking for morsels in the dry earth. There was the concrete washstand that the family hardly ever used now that they had a washing machine. Next to it was the wooden, roughly hewn table where Victor Luís, Toyota and Patricia cleaned fish or chopped up fresh island goat, and closer by, an old metate lay abandoned. A few plastic chairs and a table splayed themselves out after being used for one of Victor Luís' regular Sunday scotch-drinking get-togethers (Chivas Regal preferred) after the cockfights.

My view lengthened, and the green grey of cacti on the mountains of El Copey fuzzed the horizon, meeting the brilliant blue of the Caribbean sky. Scanning those mountains I thought of the places in front of and beyond them: Punta de Piedras, San Juan, El Valle, Juan Griego, Manzanillo, Paraguachí and Porlamar. Was Chico Salazar walking those hills, combing the beaches, playing *truco* in the shade, beguiling a new lover, or dreaming up a new business venture? Or was he just cold in the ground over in the cemetery of Las Hernandez? Where *was* Chico Salazar?

Chico's funeral had taken place yesterday afternoon. Still I could feel the intense heat generated from more than one hundred humans crowding the room that afternoon, pushing politely, determined to catch a last glimpse of the body

before it was born away. Old women beat the coffin's glass covering, imploring the dead man to rise, questioning him why he left them, loudly wailing of his goodness, crying for his salvation. Young children peeked into the wooden sepulcher, silent and wide-eyed. Men, red-eyed yet stoic, helped the bereft women outside to the fresh air. The physicalness of the event could not be avoided; hugs and pats on the back or arm were constant, and the surge of mourners left no one untouched, their sweat and tears anointing one and all.

Outside the widow and her daughter sat in the rented white plastic chairs brought from the Virgen del Valle funeral home. The widow appeared emotionally exhausted, dry, and had no more tears for this last moment. Her daughter wailed and writhed in her seat, imploring "Why? Why? My father, my father! Why have you left us, my father?" Her daughters tried to console her, to restrain her heaving body, but the strength of her grief was stronger than their love or fear.

Chico's coffin was lifted onto the shoulders of six men and borne out of the house and down the "calle principal" to the chapel in Las Hernandez. The mourners followed in cars and on foot, chatting softly among themselves as they accompanied Chico Salazar on his last earthly journey. Assembling in the modern chapel, the closest family members filled the first rows while the coffin rested in the center aisle. I remembered how Chico many times swore to me that when he died, he never wanted to pass through the church, any church. Well Chico, they beat you at your own game this time.

The young priest began to pray, and I remembered how he too could expertly toss down whiskey and talk of the women he'd known from Porlamar's discotheques. The sermon in the chapel would be the first, and perhaps last time many gathered here would ever see the man in his formal role as shepherd of District Tubores' souls.

Lifted again onto the shoulders of men who had been closest to him, Chico Salazar was carried through Las Hernandez to the small walled cemetery at it's outskirts. The burial ground was a large plot of dried earth, empty except for about 25 tombs weighing down its northeast corner. Although late in the afternoon and in December, the sun drenched the the mourners in sweat.

Late in the night before and in the early morning, workers from the family's business had prepared the burial site, digging the deep hole, pouring the cement platform and readying the slabs that would cover the coffin. The crowd now surged again up to the tomb, jostling gently their neighbors so they could be afforded a good view of the last ceremony. After all, this part of the funeral would be special, for Chico was a Mason, and the local brotherhood would perform his very last rites.

Seven men in dark suits and red waist-sashes encircled the hole in which the coffin had been placed. One, older than most of the others, stood at the head of the circle and said a brief eulogy. Then with great secrecy, and with all straining to hear and see, the older man leaned to the man on his right and whispered something in his ear. This man then whispered the words to his right, and so on, until the circle had been completed. Then all the Masons joined hands, lifted them high overhead, and shouted "*Paz, salud, unión* !" (peace, health, union). The Masons somberly shuffled away, and now people began to file by the grave to toss in a flower or two, or to just say goodbye to a man so well-known to so many Margariteños. Within a matter of minutes the cemetery was empty again. Only the workers who laid the two layers of slabs upon the coffin, sealing the tomb forever with cement, remained.

Born in 1914 in a small one-room house nestled on a rise that overlooks La Restinga in Las Hernandez, José Franciso Salazar Salazar was one of eight children. His father was a goatherd and shoemaker. He never attended a formal

school, and at the age of about 12 or 13 years, went to work on the fishing boats of Punta de Piedras. In the ensuing years he worked his way up to captain of a fishing boat, and then switched to a sailing sloop that conducted inter-island trade. He also taught himself to read and write by, he claims, practicing his letters in the sand of the beach.

When he was in his early twenties he married Blanca Salazar, who herself fondly remembers how she would find excuses to go to the waterhole - the *pozo* - to get water and surreptitiously meet with Chico. Chico continued with his inter-island trading, soon earning enough to buy his own ship. Blanca bore him a daughter, but due to complications after the birth - there were no doctors in the area - was prevented from having more children.

Chico dabbled in anything that might earn him money. He smuggled goods to Los Roques Islands (his favorite item of trade, he claimed, were women's panties), paid off officials in Margarita pearls and spent a year in jail in La Guaira, the port city by Caracas. But with his profits he built Blanca a fine house in Punta de Piedras, and built a bodega and small bar next door so that his Señora would have her own income. He had an affair with Rosa, from Los Roques, and she bore him a son who would later be abandoned at his house in Isla Margarita. He had another son on the island, who would become a exemplary fisherman later in life.

He then bought trucks to begin a distributorship of beer on Isla Margarita, and let others run his boats. With those profits, and finally selling the boats, he turned to transporting the goods the new freeport brought to the dock of Punta de Piedras, taking them to Porlamar. Finally, his last enterprise was to build up a distributorship for natural gas that the Margariteños use for cooking. He soon had the accounts of every household in Punta de Piedras, and most of the

surrounding areas. Chico was a wheeler and dealer and he enjoyed every moment of his life.

As he grew older, he let his only daughter take over the gas business. Chico turned more and more to spiritual matters, things of the occult, the practices of a syncretic religion carried out on the island. One of his house's bedroom he turned into a shrine and curing room. His reputation as a healer grew, and people from as far away as Caracas came to have him cure them.

In the fall of 1992, Chico, always on to new developments and not one to long for days gone by, bought a newly imported Russian car, the Lada. He was 78 years old and still insisted on driving everywhere, even though his eyesight was not excellent anymore. One day in early December, he left his house with Sra. Blanca for an outing. When they returned they found that his shrine and all the photographs, statues of saints and virgens, special fetishes—all was burnt to ashes. The people all said this was a terrible omen, but Chico seemingly shrugged it off.

On December 14, 1992, Chico and two of his friends were on an early morning outing in his Lada in Punta de Piedras. Chico was driving. As he came around a bend in the road, a speeding Pepsi-Cola truck crossed the center line and hit the Lada head on. The crash only bruised the other two men, but Chico was impaled on the Lada's steering column, dying almost instantly.

The life and death of Chico Salazar can be seen as representative of the island of Margarita. Much of what was lived in this man's 78 years was lived by the majority of Margariteños, or at least known of and indirectly experienced. As Chico changed, adapted to, and manipulated the new ways, so did the island's people. And as Chico has died, so much of the original Margarita too is dying, kept only alive in the memories of the children of the past. One finds it difficult to

miss the irony of Chico being killed by an icon of the modern world: Pepsi-Cola. And so it is the modern that is replacing, not always in such a violent manner, the traditional ways of Isla Margarita. What remains now is a melange, a pastiche of older island ways and beliefs and the new international values and actions of market capitalism. The island is almost schizophrenic in its day to day existence, the contrasts and conflicts so recent and so jarring that oftentimes it seems that life on Margarita is lived devoid of logic. What will emerge in the pages that follow is a description of how all these disparate parts still form a whole, a whole that is fragile, a whole that struggles against itself, and like a nightmarish M.C. Escher work, a whole that threatens to turn upon itself, swallowing up its extremities, and emerging again somewhere on the other side.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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May, 1996

Chairman: Paul A. Doughty
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Change came quickly to Isla Margarita, Venezuela. Cut off from regular contact with the mainland until ferry service started in 1958, islanders often say that Isla Margarita accomplished in ten years what took sixty in the rest of the world. But the changes were incomplete: while tourists frolic on beaches back-lighted by a Miami-like skyline, the majority of Margariteños scramble daily from their crude concrete block homes, just barely eking out a living. How and why Isla Margarita has become such a land of economic contrast is at the heart of this study.

Isla Margarita's abundant pearl beds had once attracted Spanish conquistadors, and the island played an important role in the nineteenth century wars of independence. But for more than a century Isla Margarita had languished, its inhabitants surviving on spiriting contraband through the Caribbean, artesanal fishing and later, remuneration from Margariteños working the oil rigs of Maracaibo.

In 1974 the culturally homogenous island would begin a complete transformation by making its largest city, Porlamar, into a glittering center of international commerce and by turning the island into a free port. From the free port structure in Porlamar grew a haphazard tourism. Combined with rampant corruption, little planning, and the crash of the Venezuelan economy due to falling oil prices, the island has experienced terrible garbage, sewage and pollution problems, a continual shortage of fresh water, unregulated construction, and a perceived lower quality of life for islanders.

Using data gathered during almost three years of fieldwork on Isla Margarita, the author examines how cultural and economic disparities have evolved out of a process of uneven development of free port commercialism and tourism. The study concludes that while tourism on Isla Margarita has changed much of the island's original face, it has not functioned as a panacea for underdevelopment. The sharp discontinuities in development have divided the island -- urban versus rural, new versus old, rich versus poor. Now there are not one but many Margaritas.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

"Eclecticism may not be the route to theoretical precision, but sometimes it is the only route available," (Gilpin 1987: xv).

The Scope of the Problem

As far as can be ascertained, this is the first study of Isla Margarita that attempts to deal with the island in its entirety, from the past to the future, describing the gamut of what is island life: the dominant forms of making a living, the religion, the fiestas, the politics and the sexual politics. Previous North American ethnographies of Isla Margarita focused on one community only or some aspect of the same (Cook: 1991; Orona 1969; McCorkle 1965). Alexander's (1958) study is inclusive, but focused more on a geography of the island than the presentation of an ethnographic vision. Venezuelan works have been slightly more inclusive, but again, they are limited by their focus on one particular sphere of island life, such as the crime rate (Bravo Dávila 1993) or they are strictly anecdotal in essence (Aristinaño 1980).

This study has become unabashedly a modern form of an anthropological ethnography. The idea that anthropology does not need more ethnographies seems foolish, as does the thought that anthropology has moved beyond the ethnography as a viable product of anthropological field research. If cultural change is constant, then we as social scientists need to account for that change in some inclusive form, and document it. If studies become so focused on one aspect of a community, soon the larger systems and

results of change will lose their meaning and the intellectual exercises become just that, intellectual exercises that have little resemblance to real life.

However, ethnographies of the late twentieth century should be different than their counterparts of decades ago. First, they should fully abandon any notion of the "ethnographic present" and admit that nothing in culture stands still, and especially at the turn of the century, no group of people on the Earth stand alone. The connections now being made cross-culturally through television, satellites, and most amazingly, new information technology such as the computerized Internet are and will have the profound impact of diminishing the reliance on the "little community" as a point of reference for the individual, and increasing the importance of being part of a new "global culture." The processes of cultural adaptation, adoption and acculturation are intensified with the newest modes of communication. Already one can see the effects of television on not only musical and clothing trends, but the power of something like CNN showing the Persian Gulf War "live at five." Even Comandante Zero of the Chiapas, Mexico peasant revolt in 1995 had his communiques on the Internet within hours of releasing them, sending them to all parts of the world.

Secondly, ethnographies must account for how a particular community or culture fits into this newly fluid and far-reaching global existence. I remember, back in the 1980s, being asked to review a recent study of a Guatemalan village. The piece was well-written and researched, but to me was far from complete because the author made no mention of the political violence so prevalent in the Guatemalan countryside at that time. The village studied was in the thick of such activities, but the author did not report even cursorily that such terrorism was occurring. Asking another colleague why they thought such important events should be ignored in an

ethnography, I was offered the explanation that perhaps the ethnographer did not like to present the "ugly side" of life!

I do not believe that anthropologists should so freely pick and choose what data to look at and what should be ignored. We cannot, as one archaeologist in the 1940s did by throwing into the Mississippi River pot shards that did not fit his research design, fail to report as many significant events as is possible. No one will ever succeed in doing a 100% ethnography, but it is a goal entrenched in the ideals of anthropology. What we choose to emphasize will vary depending on one's research interests, but significant events--war, famine, migrations, increasing or decreasing poverty, etc.--deserve to be treated. If not there will be no baseline for future studies, and no ground for understanding human behavior in all its complexity.

I began my work about Isla Margarita in May of 1989 during a preliminary field visit. It was a little more than a month after the riots that were set off by the implementation of social spending cutbacks resulting from the federal government's agreements with the International Monetary Fund. This atmosphere of unrest was hard to ignore as much of my plans had to be changed or postponed because of transportation workers and teachers strikes.

My goal, admittedly narrow, was to find one fishing village that was undergoing social and economic change due to the recent introduction of tourism. My interests in tourism-initiated cultural change came from my earlier studies that focused on the conflicts engendered between fishermen and those who wanted to "develop" the fishing areas for tourism (Kitner 1986). These studies led me to look at issues dealing with the classic "tragedy of the commons" problem (Acheson and McCay 1989, McCay 1992) and conflicts of property rights. Most often those who were competing with fishermen for their common property resources - the beaches, the ocean, and

their "quaint" villages - were people (most often backed by government or multinational concerns) who wanted to develop hotels or large resorts, to build restaurants and nightclubs, roads and airports. It seemed only a natural progression of my interest in maritime communities to then focus my doctoral research upon the question of how fishermen deal with the growing presence of tourism development and the conflicts and changes that this development begets.

When I arrived in Isla Margarita in 1992, I decided to spend a month living in the main city of Porlamar to give myself a chance to figure out the "lay of the land" and work on getting my Spanish up to the speed of that spoken by the Margariteño fishermen. Searching for an appropriate field site, I went daily with marine biologists from the biological research station of La Salle to 90% of the fishing villages of the island. But again my plans were delayed when the coup attempt of February 4 resulted in the imposition of martial law and the suspension of constitutional guarantees across Venezuela. News of the coup attempt and speculation about its results permeated and overtook every aspect of island life for weeks.

When things calmed down, I decided to conduct fieldwork in La Galera, a small fishing village with an incipient tourism industry present, for a variety of reasons to be detailed later. By mid-March, 1992 I was installed in a fishing family's house in La Galera, and becoming confused about the course my research could or should take.

While conducting a detailed census of the village, I began to question the appropriateness of my research design. Although it took a few months more to actually make the decision to shift my research priorities, I soon saw that doing an artificially enclosed ethnography of La Galera would undoubtedly misrepresent what was and is occurring on Isla Margarita. The

problems that beset the Galerenses in their daily lives are the same that torture the rest of island's residents, and that the sources of these problems lie outside of the villages. The sources are not just some big abstraction that could be labeled "tourism development" but is a tangled nest of multiple actions emanating from the overlapping spheres of the state, nation and world. The problem I faced was how to draw the artificial lines that would allow me to focus on a manageable data base for my research.

Human beings have never lived in truly sheltered and isolated communities. The island of Margarita—from pre-colonial times when the indigenes traded with other coastal and insular peoples and later with the international trade propagated by the Spanish, to the current days of global, cosmopolitan commerce and tourism visiting the island--has never been isolated from the process of change brought from without. Today the events occurring at a national and global level will filter back down to the 80-year-old grandmother sitting on her front stoop, sucking tamarind seeds in the afternoon's fading light. She laments that not so many people buy from her stock of *refrescos* (soft drinks) as did last year. Why? Because not so many people came to the beach this year. Why not? Because no one has that much money anymore. Why don't they? Because of the inflation caused by the *paquete*, the economic package of IMF-designed monetary reforms instituted by the federal government in 1992. And what else? No one feels safe to travel because of the coup attempts and riots, which came about in response to the hardships induced by the *paquete*. It becomes like the nursery rhyme the House That Jack Built, one thing after another leading to one thing after another.

I therefore expanded the scope of my study as much as humanly possible to incorporate the island in its entirety. This called for documenting

not only the changes that had occurred in the fishing economy, but also those in the other island economies of agriculture, crafts and smuggling. It meant dealing with the history and current state of the freeport, that massive swirl of unfettered commercialism that had so changed the island in the past two decades. It meant looking at tourism also, and trying to determine what different impacts that phenomenon was responsible for setting off, if any. I also felt compelled to examine the local impacts of the the economic and political turmoil that grips the country to this day (1996). These latter events set the tone on the island just as much as did the swelling tourism industry. I believed and still do, that even a small fishing village like La Galera does not sit alone on the shores of the Caribbean, changing or perservering in isolation from the world without. Nor did I see that the Galerenses are passively being victimized by a few forces from without the village. Those who lived in La Galera, just as the rest of the Margariteños, were interacting as best they could with the challenges presented to them. This form of interaction could be best called opportunistic cultural multiplicity, after Crandon-Malamud's use of the term in a somewhat different fashion (1993). The Margariteños are responding to changes in both their social and economic environment by actively pursuing and delineating new opportunities, looking for the loopholes in the current changing economy, and claiming the changes as their own.

Thus this study analyzes change at the level of the community which is Isla Margarita, but also traces the more "macro" forces which also have impacts at the "micro" level. Neither my expertise nor the scope of the research allow for any in-depth analysis of macroeconomic and political events. However, as stated at the outset, these events will not be ignored for

to do so would negate their importance in understanding the processes of change occurring on the island in the 1990s..

A Brief and Critical Examination of Tourism

Anthropological interest in the impact tourism development has on traditional communities dates back to at least the 1960s, when Nuñez (1963) wrote about the phenomena of *weekendismo* in the small Mexican village of Cajititlán. His case is interesting for this particular study because the tourists he describes are primarily Mexican themselves, not foreign visitors, as are the tourists described in many of the other sociological and anthropological studies of tourism. The case of Isla Margarita is of the same ilk: for most of its history as a tourist attraction, the island has attracted visitors that were mostly from the larger mainland cities, and not from outside the country.

From Nuñez's study there have followed numerous other studies of tourism from a social science perspective (de Kadt 1979; Cohen 1972; Gonsalves and Holden 1985; Graburn 1983; Matthews 1977; Mathieson and Wall 1982, Smith 1989; Turner and Ash 1975; Hall 1994; Seaton, ed. 1994).

Tourism has been used more and more in the recent past as a development scheme in developing countries, and as such, the goal of such schemes are for economic betterment. But there remains the nagging question of whether or not the changes wrought by tourism are beneficial to the host population in alleviating their poverty or whether tourism may increase their impoverishment. The discussion in the social sciences of just what tourism is and how it impacts the "host" populations has been dressed in various theoretical cloths.

Nash (1989:37) sees tourism as a form of imperialism and compares tourists to "...the trader, the employer, the conqueror, the governor, the

educator or the missionary." Nash defines imperialism as the expansion of a society's interests--economic, political, military--in lands not their own, and involve elements of an uneven flow of power. Early forms of tourism, such as medieval religious pilgrims, or the elites vacationing in country villas, may have constituted, according to Nash, a sort of "proto-tourism," (1989:39). However, this form of tourism can not be considered imperialistic because it never became a pervasive social phenomenon, and it never really challenged any existing power structures.

Because most modern-day tourists hail from what Nash calls the "productive centers" of the world, the "metropolitan centers," (1989:39). He goes on to say:

Such metropolitan centers have varying degrees of control over the nature of tourism and its development, but they exercise it--at least at the beginning of their relationship with tourist areas--in alien regions. It is this power over touristic and related developments abroad that makes a metropolitan center imperialistic and tourism a form of imperialism.

While not coming out and stating it boldly, what Nash seems to be saying is that tourism as it exists today is a result of the global process of dependent development. This point will be further explored below in my discussion of Isla Margarita and the world system.

In the following section I will first define the nature of tourism and then discuss the general impacts tourism development on maritime communities by giving various examples of such interactions around the world, and focusing specifically on the case of Isla Margarita.

One point should be emphasized: the most common form of tourism promoted in the past and until very recently has been that of mass tourism. Now that people around the world have changing sensibilities--for example,

being more aware of problems such as environmental degradation--and thus changing desires, the form of tourism offered must also change (Hart 1994). No longer satisfied, in fact, more horrified, by the huge standardized resorts built around the world, today's and tomorrow's tourist seems to want to experience a more "sensitive" tourism, or indulge more in the variant known as ecotourism. How this will impact again the communities that have geared themselves to large waves of homogenous tourists is yet to be seen. Will these communities that have turned their economies to tourism be left by the wayside for other forms of the tourism experience? Will they be able to retool their offerings to take advantage of a changing market? Having transformed themselves and their surroundings into modern manifestations, will tourists even find them interesting anymore?

The definition of what is a tourist seems to pose a problem. Crick (1989) notes that people may engage in leisure travel, but may not have the same motivations for doing so. He claims rightly that there are seemingly as many definitions of tourism as there are researchers (1989:313):

Typologies abound based on different motivations, levels of affluence, length of stay, methods of organization and so on. Typically, though, these taxonomies are incommensurable, leave out obvious distinctions, and separate phenomena that are clearly fuzzy or overlapping.

The problem of defining what a tourist is, or what tourism is has also been addressed by Cohen (1972). For my purposes, I find it most convenient to draw on the work of Valene Smith in both the definition of the act and personage of tourism. Therefore, tourism is the travel of people from their familiar surroundings to strange ones for the purpose of pleasure, or as Smith states, "a tourist is a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change,"

(1989:1). It is the aspect of pleasure that makes one a tourist and not a merchant, a diplomat or an immigrant.

That tourism is so often seen as a positive force for socioeconomic development and cultural revitalization in the Third World and as an agent of peace and international understanding can be historically linked to the ideology espoused by the enterprises of Thomas Cook, the originator of mass tourism (Turner and Ash 1975:51). As an example of how Cook's practice helped to create the concept of tourism as a force for cultural interaction and thus peaceful coexistence one can look at how the British Empire indirectly helped Thomas Cook and Son in expanding their touristic reach by encouraging and endorsing royal and colonial trips to and from Egypt and India. That the upper classes of these two possessions could now travel to the "center" (England) was seen as an act of enlightenment and of Human Progress, itself the soul concept of development.

Furthermore, Cook standardized travel and the traveler's destinations. Once opened to the masses, the originality of destinations would necessarily decline. In order to provide the same service for these thousands of new visitors, all the cultural quirks and wrinkles of a place were ironed out, leading to a homogeneity in the tourism enterprise that is evident today. Tourism hence became an industry producing a dependable standard commodity -- pleasure.

The major breakthrough for the growth of the tourism industry was a constellation of various recent events: World War II, the increase of wages in the Western nations (or core states, if one follows a center/periphery argument) and the related increase of leisure time, and ideologically, the spreading idea of people becoming modern.

First there was WW II, which forced the expansion of both international communication and transportation systems. Of greatest importance was the popularization of the airplane which cut vast distances to relatively short skips and hops. The war also brought to its participants a new vision of the world: one that saw it as varied, diverse and intriguing. Soldiers that had served in the Pacific saw not only the horrors of war but the beauty of coral atolls in turquoise waters. Thus the mentality of provincialism in Europe and the United States cosmopolitan and the possibility of international travel for pleasure's sake did not appear as odd or restricted to the upper classes as before World War II.

Critical also to the growth of tourism was the increase in wages for the middle classes due to economic growth in the Northern countries after the War. This particularly true of the United States, whose economy was not physically devastated as in much of Europe. The First World came to have higher wages and simultaneously more leisure time. This aspect of the growth in tourism is also clear in the case of what happened in the late 1970s in Isla Margarita. Because the whole country was experiencing a boom in income, leisure time increased, and the desire to do something with the extra earnings surfaced. While the wealthiest Venezuelans went abroad to enjoy their vacations, members of the middle class went to Margarita.

Leisure is culturally specific and is also the mark of modern society, a critical idea when exploring the growth of tourism and its newer form, ecotourism. John Urry calls mass tourism the "quintessential feature of modern life," and that "with the changes in the direction of a *post-industrial society* , there has been the emergence of what has been journalistically characterized as 'post-tourism' " (1990:35-36).

Leisure as tourism is also a class statement and different types of tourism can mark one as more or less modern, with wealth making for the most modern type. This link between wealth, modernity and travel goes much further back than WW II, a classic era for this being the 1920's when the international rich played on the beaches of the French Riviera (interestingly, the rise in popularity of a suntan dates to this period also). However far back one may wish to go, it is almost a truism that in order for one to be seen as modern and wealthy, one travels, but one is also discriminating in the areas visited. The more remote and unique the destination is, hence the more expensive, the better to keep one's elite position in society. This preoccupation with the exotic, the remote, and now, the politically correct and environmentally responsible is infused in the new ecotourism. This is curious, for the ideology of ecotourism is often one of egalitarianism and understanding the "plight" of those who live in the Third World.

Related to the self-conceptualization of being modern, the destinations of today's tourists have changed. Comparing tourists to the old Golden Horde descended from Genghis Khan and who terrorized the European tribes, Turner and Ash (1976:1) state:

In the past, it was the great commercial centers of the world like Constantinople and Vienna which were threatened. Today, it is the Nomads of Affluence, coming from the new Constantinoples – cities like New York, London, Hamburg or Tokyo – who are creating a newly dependent, social and geographic realm: The Pleasure Periphery.

The pleasure periphery is normally associated with the "sun, sex, and surf" variant of tourism (Smith 1989:5), to be discussed below. Geographically, the pleasure periphery extends as a sweep of countries from Mexico to the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, through East Africa to SE Asia and the Pacific islands and then back to Mexico (Lea 1988). However, it

should be noted that there is now another flow of tourists: those of the elite strata of developing nations visiting as tourists the developed world. While this flow may not yet be anything on the level of those who go to the pleasure periphery, it poses the interesting question of just who will be studying who in the future.

Types of Tourism and Tourists

Smith (1989) identifies five types of tourism that are distinguished by their main activity focus: ethnic, cultural, historical, recreational and environmental.

Ethnic tourism is geared toward visiting the world's remaining tribal peoples, such as the Kuna of Panama and the Warao of Venezuela. Smith notes that some of the activities that accompany this type of tourism are visits to native homes and villages, observing traditional ceremonial celebrations, and buying indigenous arts and crafts (See Schadler 1979). It is where the people themselves are seen as the attraction, as a sort of "living museum." This type of tourism is a variant of ecotourism, as can be seen in advertisements to visit the "exotic" Amazon tribes and experience their culture. Such offers are geared towards the more educated classes, and, at least in the United States, a good many of these advertisements appear in such publications as the Smithsonian Magazine and the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Cultural tourism is directed towards the romanticized "peasant past," the era of colonialism, horse-drawn carriages or ox-carts, and emphasis on a long-gone, seemingly simpler way of life. Smith notes that this types of tourism may have a negative impact on the actual peasant populations that surround larger, tourism-oriented towns by creating a migrational pull and

upsetting local economies (also see Oliver-Smith 1989). This same criticism should be applied equally to that of ethnic tourism.

Historical tourism focuses on the "glories " of the past in places such as Rome, Egypt, the Aztec pyramids or Machu Pichu. "Favored destination activities included guided tours of mountains and ruins, and especially light and sound performances that encapsulated into a brief historical drama the lifestyle and key events that textbooks record," (Smith 1989:5). This type of tourism is usually accompanied by a well-defined service industry, and host-guest interactions are minimal and superficial.

Recreational tourism promotes the conglomeration of sun, surf, sand, and sex to sell a location as the perfect spot to "get away from it all." Activities include sports such as golf, sunbathing, sailing, curative spas, good food and entertainment, including prostitution (particularly in Indonesia, where Cohen [1982] describes the selling of sex to tourists in Thailand). Cancún and Ixtapa-Zijuatenejo in Mexico, and Isla Margarita, are all excellent examples of resorts geared towards nothing but recreational tourism (Bosselman 1978).

Environmental tourism is seen by Smith to be often ancillary to ethnic tourism, for when people travel to remote areas of the world to view natural scenery, there are often encounters with the area's population. Usually the environmental and cultural impact of this type of tourism is negligible; however one is reminded of the immense crowds that now overrun Yellowstone National Park, who with their numbers threaten faunal and floral viability. Ecotourism could be said to be a combination of both ethnic and environmental tourism.

In actuality, all of these types of tourism tend to overlap, especially now that ecotourism is becoming so popular. The response of the tourist sector

has been to try to mix the various types of tourism to better cater to the tourists desires. In this way, a tourist may spend a week in Isla Margarita enjoying the beach and sun, then fly to Caracas for two days to visit historical sites and art museums, and perhaps end their vacation with a few days visit to the indigenous tribes of tupuy region of Venezuela.

Of the above-mentioned types of tourism I will be concerned with only recreational (mass) tourism as opposed to the varieties known as ethnic and environmental tourism. This is the type of tourism that has come to dominate on Isla Magarita, although there have been some attempts to develop more ecotourist-oriented activities on the western area of the island.

Mass tourism is characterized by a large and steady or predictable seasonal flow of people equipped with "middle class" values and a middle class purse. The resorts are not exclusive, except perhaps to the majority of the local population. The infrastructure of mass tourism is international--the hotels, tourist agencies, and air transportation facilities are invariably run by corporations based in Western countries or the larger cities of the specific country. The tourist industry in these instances employ locals as maids, waiters, taxi-cab drivers, etc. Most of the higher-paying positions are filled by the local elite, and positions such as manager are often held by foreign nationals. I will show this to be true in at least two instances in Isla Margarita.

Because the countries that generate the most tourists are in the West and many (but not most) of these tourists travel to the periphery, there is often the subtle presence of inequality in host-guest relationships. Such inequality is reinforced by elements of power seen on various levels. While I will not discuss here the sociological and historical considerations of race in the Caribbean and in Latin America, there exists the unspoken power

differential that resides in ethnic and class differences, that is, many tourists are white and their hosts are not (deKadt 1979). This has particularly caused problems (including anti-tourist riots some years ago) in Bermuda, Jamaica, the Bahamas and the Virgin Islands. On a more innocuous level, tourists are seen as prime subjects for petty crime. I was often told by islanders who were bitter about the path tourism development had taken that pickpocketing or petty theft from tourists was justified because they "deserve it, having the attitudes they have."

There are power conflicts at the national level, as when a government decides whether to allow international development of multinational or national corporations of a resort area. And there are further questions of power on a local level: how does the indigenous population benefit or suffer from the rapid economic and structural changes wrought by tourism?

In the country that sends tourists, one must also ask how these tourists contribute to the development of new resorts. Are there social forces at work which may lower the demand for one type of leisure activity while increasing the desire for another? Lea (1988:23) notes the important role tourism marketing plays in deliberately creating a desirable image of some tourist destinations in the Third World. Often this demand did not exist until a particular tourism firm gave it life. This creation of imagery appears to be crucial in understanding the new ecotourism, for it is now chic to be environmentally aware if one lives in the industrialized North. Such a fashion statement in one country may have great ramifications in another country, much as the United States' taste for beef has environmental repercussions in Brazil or Costa Rica. Furthermore, as an activity becomes fashionable among the wealthy, the less well-off seek to emulate that behavior, and thus the demand for it increases, leading the market to

respond with greater output of the desired commodity. Such may be the case with the new ecotourism.

Tourism and Its Role in Cultural Change

One of the central issues of anthropology has always been the analysis of cultural change. Such change may be come from changes in technology, which could range from the implementation of irrigation systems to the introduction of outboard gasoline motors for fishermen. Change might also come from shifting political allegiances and conflicts, or from new economic schemes. From whatever the cause, the impacts of change are

What makes tourism so interesting to investigate as an agent of cultural change is that it induces changes on so many different levels, making it a rich and complex ground for study. The introduction of tourism to a community may affect the individual by changing one's worldview, and subsequently that person will impart this view to others. There is room for the study of innovation, acculturation, adaptation and maladaptation...

The impacts of tourism are most often divided into three analytical categories: cultural, economic and environmental. I admit to the difficulty of trying to artificially separate these three areas. Part of the problem facing development schemes during the implementation phase is due to the tendency to emphasize only one of these categories to the exclusion of the other two. For example, when considering the costs and benefits of tourism-induced development, some governments are tempted to only see the potential economic returns and remain ignorant of possibly detrimental social and environmental impacts of large-scale tourism. This is what has happened in Isla Margarita, and it is only recently that local leaders have

begun to listen to opposing viewpoints on the impact of tourism on island life.

One of the conflicts facing Third World governments interested in promoting tourism is how to provide an improved quality of life for their populace while at the same time preserving the environment so that both the tourist will be attracted to it and the local population can continue to exploit local resources if necessary. This is a serious problem, for example, in African game reserves where many of the animals tourists come to see are perceived locally to either be a source of food or a nuisance when they overrun croplands. Some governments have tried to reduce this conflict by employing local populations as game wardens, tourist guides, or fulfilling a need of the local population in trade for their environmental protection. thus giving people more stake in preserving the environment (Lusigi, 1989). This approach is taken by McNeely (1988). McNeely gives an example of the Matobo National park in Zimbabwe where the local population was given rights to harvest thatch with the understanding that they would not continue to graze cattle in the park nor poach the wildlife (1988:156). In this case all involved seem to benefit.

There is a need for caution in believing that all environmental conflicts over access to natural resources can be resolved so smoothly. There are differing priorities between "rich western nations, which generally see the destruction of the environment as a pressing problem affecting everyone in the world , and the poor developing countries, whose priorities are first to raise their own living standards to acceptable levels," (Lea 1988). This conflict of interest is illustrated clearly in the concern over the destruction of the Amazonian rain forest. Whether sustainable tourism in this region can help alleviate poverty while maintaining biological diversity is debatable. One of

the important questions is whether the maintainance of diversity should extend to cultures themselves. Tourism is a well-known cause of declining cultural heterogeneity, so while it may help preserve natural richness it may impoverish cultural integrity. This is indirectly noted in an article by McNeely and Thorsell (1989:30) where they praise "effective management" for enhancing the "quality of the national heritage resources that attract tourists." They give the example of Tai island in Fiji, "where as a result of protection, subsistence fish catches have increased, tourist activity has expanded, and the holders of traditional fishing rights are involved in resort management and boat hire." This appears to be quite a change for the villagers of Tai island and one should wonder if the increased catches of fish stress the marine communities optimum sustainable yield.

How have such changes affected the social structures of the community under study? Has wage labor just been introduced? Has the role of women changed? If there has been a shift from a subsistence economy to a waged economy, have the standards of living dropped or improved? Who is now holding fishing rights? Has this upset traditional patterns of inheritance or community solutions for conservation? This is not a moot question as it is increasingly recognized that traditional patterns of resource use are often less destructive of natural habitat than those introduced by tourism or agricultural development programs. This is felt to be the case by marine biologists in Isla Margarita, where it has been decided that artisanal fishing as it is currently practiced, is sustainable and should be "left alone," not tampered with by trying to increase its efficiency through increased mechanization.

Other negative impacts on environmental quality from tourism are pollution, which has numerous forms but can be categorized as air, water,

waste and noise pollution. Automobiles, boating, road and marina runoff, sewage discharge into bodies of water, littering and trash disposal and loud noises from traffic and certain recreational vehicles like jet-skis are all major contributors.

The loss of natural landscape, agricultural and pastoral lands is related to the the conflict over commonly held resources. What may once have been used for community purposes is often restricted to tourist use. This was the case in Isla Mujeres in 1986 when the local fishermen were finally prohibited from frequenting a beach traditionally used for mending their nets (Kitner 1986). The local government decided that the nets smelled and that the beach could better be used as a location to build small seaside cafes to cater to the tourists that visited from Cancún. In the same location fishermen were also driven from some fishing grounds in order that tourist boats might swim and dive in that area. This is also noted in Chapter 8 on fishing, where there erupts a controversy between tourism interests that want to construct a cruiseliner dock and the fishermen who would lose their fishing grounds if the dock were built.

The destruction of flora and fauna effects of both the amount of ing pollution and loss of habitat both diminishing the diversity of biota. Furthermore, just the regular hiking, vandalism, unintentional forest fires, etc. have a negative impact on the environment. I include in this category the destruction of traditional buildings and architecture in favor of modern tourist dwellings.

The effects of tourism-induced congestion is again due to the amount of tourists present in one area. The end result of such crowding is considerable stress on the environment through destruction of flora and fauna and pollution.

Conflict results when the social tension is produced by a small, local population is forced to live with large influxes of visitors and compete with the tourists for access to basic amenities such as food, potable water, and space. Competition relates directly to the loss of natural landscapes and resources. Since there are fixed amounts of these quantities, there will be some persons who will not have equal access to resources. This in turn may lead to persons being displaced from traditional economic pursuits such as agriculture, or becoming landless as property values and taxes rise precipitously (Oliver-Smith et al., 1989). If this occurs on a large scale, the ability of the tourist sector to absorb this surplus labor will be strained. Also, tourism-related employment may attract labor away from other economic spheres like fishing, leading to a decline in local production or problems due to migration overload.

One of the supposed benefits from introducing tourism is that of increasing employment opportunities for the local population. Hotels, restaurants, and new transportation networks all offer possibilities to local people. But there are numerous problems involved with introducing an essentially capitalistic economy to what is basically a rural community (in this case, maritime) that operates most like a peasant mode of production, where labor-organization is often kin-based and production is for the household first and for the market second. I am speaking, of course, of an ideal type. In the fishing communities I have studied, market involvement has already been pronounced.

First, the market for local produce, in this instance, fish, will increase due to increased demand from the tourist sector. This may or may not have deleterious effects on the local population's diet. Having expectations and desires rise for modernity, fisherpeople may want more cash to buy more

modern things. It is often predicted that they will thus sell more of their product, leaving less for household consumption. In Jamaica, however, Beslisle (1985) sees the problem as how to increase local supplies of food to the tourist sector. He states that a lack of refrigeration or fish processing units limits the local fishermen to having to sell their product fresh and unable to ship it to the hotels or restaurants. Also, the local population consumes any catches made, and there is little surplus for the tourist sector. On Isla Margarita, this problem is presented in the inverse: the tourist and off-island populations consume most of the product, leaving little for the local people. I therefore tend to question whether increasing supplies to hotels should be considered as more important than continuing to allow locals access to an inexpensive form of protein.

The opposite has occurred along the Caribbean coast of Mexico where spiny lobster is heavily exploited. While fishing families and others in the community of Isla Mujeres can obtain fresh fish almost always, local consumption of lobster has greatly declined; the price it receives through export to Jacksonville, Florida or at the local hotels in Cancún is too great and makes it a luxury good. So tempting is the profit to be made from lobster that during the closed fishing season there is an extensive black market in lobster. Further south along the coast, in the fishing village of Punta Allen, lobster and other marketable species are caught exclusively for sale in the northern tourist centers. All of the product is shipped out by a small truck. On arriving one day in the village's only *comedor*, I was informed that there was no fish to be served, only rice and beans, as everything was taken to Cancún that morning. Perhaps it was only me that couldn't eat fish, that the locals had retained plenty. Still, it is indicative of the great change tourism has

wrought in the area of local consumption, going from production for use to production for exchange.

DeKadt (1979) also notes that food prices often rise when tourism is introduced. Tourism often attracts labor from agriculture and fishing to relatively high-paying construction and tourism jobs, creating a shortage of labor in former activities and forcing more food to be imported.

The last point leads to the observation that tourism does sometimes provide additional employment opportunities to locals. When the fishing is bad, fishermen often have the opportunity to work as fishing guides for tourists, as was the case in Isla Mujeres. But this rarely happened in Isla Margarita in any way to be considered a viable economic option for fishermen. The nature of the tourist was such that going out with a native *pescador* would not be their ideal fun excursion. I also had the impression that this feeling was mutual, and that local fishermen exult in their independence and find it insulting to be thought of as a glorified taxi driver. Thus tourism does not always work as a security net for rural peoples. However, it may also work the other way: if tourism is seasonal, the local fisherman, normally employed, for example, as a taxi cab driver, can go back to fishing when the tourist crowds dwindle. This was indeed the case with some families in Isla Margarita, Venezuela. In general, tourism changes the economic opportunities for maritime communities in shifting them from a single employment strategy to a mixed household economy. But again my fieldwork offers a qualifier here: as seen by data gathered in the fishing village of La Galera, it was not the fishermen who shifted to work in tourism, but rather the women of the household. However, as has been noted in the Marxist literature, tourism as a capitalistic enterprise can retain local marginal populations both as a reserve labor supply and as a means of keeping wages

low as the costs of reproduction are maintained at the level of the household (Bradby 1980). If the tourist market is employing women in low-skilled positions, and the women are primarily supported through fishing, than this observation is doubly true for Isla Margarita.

Another way tourism may change a small community is to create or revive a market for local handicrafts. Schadler (1979) notes how some African tribes have switched from producing art as solely a religious product to production for the tourist market. Sometimes such work is known as "airport art," being sold to the tourists as they leave the country. This, according to Schadler, has not had serious degenerative impacts on the local religions, as the tribes distinguish between production of the sacred and the profane. In some cases tourism has acted to revive traditional art forms, as can be noted with the Eskimo's art as discussed by Smith (1989). While I was in Cumaná, Venezuela I twice saw two Warao Indians from the interior weaving their way between the café tables filled with tourists. They were selling various objects that were probably at one time solely utilitarian in purpose, especially their long bows and arrows. But as will be shown in Chapter Eight, handicrafts on Isla Margarita have been so marginalized by the form of tourism that exists on the island that this assumption is not true in all cases.

Finally, the question of tourism-induced migration should be raised. The phenomenon of migration can be observed in at least two ways: in-migration to the tourist site and out-migration away from the tourist site. The first aspect seems to be the most common, and again Cancún will serve as a good example. When plans for this resort city were first begun, the coast of Cancún was populated by about 400 fishermen and their families in the pueblo of Puerto Juarez. This was in the early 1970's. Today the area has

about 300,000 inhabitants (Daltabuit and Pi-Sunyer 1989). The growing tourist resort has attracted persons not only from the interior of Quintana Roo and the neighboring state of Yucatán, but from as far away as Chiapas and México City. The new population is sometimes housed in tract developments that seem to appear overnight. These houses have probably improved the welfare of their inhabitants. Others are not so lucky. The rise of shantytowns is also observed, accompanied by crime, unsanitary conditions, and crowding. The same is happening in neighboring Isla Mujeres, where the local community has experience an influx of migrants who "squat" on any available land, producing conflicts between local, "traditional" residents and the (often) Maya who have migrated. Also noted was an increase in ethnic conflict, where most *isleños* are mestizo and see themselves as more "civilized" than the Maya who have moved to their community.

Related to migration, and alluded to above, are the changes tourism induces by changing local population's access to the resources of the community. This can occur through shifts in ownership of land or changes in access to once commonly held resources, such as the land for agriculture or the ocean.

Oliver-Smith, Jurado and Lisón (1989) have explored this phenomena in the village of Mijas in Spain. They focused on what they have termed permanent or residential tourism, which is aimed at longterm visitors or permanent foreign residents (1989:347). This type of tourism has been characterized by foreign developers buying up inexpensive land and turning it into luxury condominiums. This was seen as a wonderful opportunity by the local peasantry, who, "after a life of hard labor and penury, would [be allowed] to live out their days in modest comfort." However, peasants were dismayed to find that their properties were resold at higher profits, inflating

the value of land. Furthermore, resources like water passed in the control of the foreign developers. Agriculture declined with declining availability of land. This was offset by new jobs in construction that paid high wages. In short, control of local resources passed from the hand of the locals to the hands of foreign interests, and in doing so changed the economy from a peasant mode of production to that of a capitalistic economy with a fully proletarianized work force. Oliver-Smith, et al. have discovered that Mijas is now trying to regain some control over their resources through taxes, building permits, and improved water supplies. The development of inflated property values posed the problem of housing to Mijeños, the cost prohibiting the young from settling in Mijas and offering the only option of migration (see above). The community has now set up a program of a type of subsidized housing in order to help local residents to stay in Mijas.

Another example of losing local control of resources is noted by Daltabuit and Pi-Sunyer in the village of Cobá in Quintana Roo, Mexico. The tourism that is occurring there is most commonly called ecotourism. Cobá is the site of a vast Mayan archaeological site in various states of reconstruction and excavation. In the 1970's the Mexican government designated the area a national park. The peasants were compensated with title to other land. Later a road was constructed to facilitate tourism and more land was taken from the locals. The authors stress that perhaps the loss of resources does not pose such a strong threat by rather the fact that villagers were never consulted about such developments. This had led to a series of protests and confrontations, but not over tourism per say "a situation which denies local people any role in the tourist trade other than that of unskilled labor," (1989:9).

Isla Margarita in the World System

In the following section I would like to explain why Isla Margarita does not fit neatly into one theoretical camp, but rather, the situation must be grasped and understood by using more than one analytical tool, each at a different level of analysis.

The first level looks at the individual and how he or she reacts in the face of social change, in this case, change in the material/economic base of the culture. The people have dealt with the change as best they can, mostly by acting opportunistically, for example, selling land to tourists or increasing hammock production and style to better capture the tourist market. Such response to social change at the individual level can be adequately understood and analyzed with the old theories of Homer Barnett.

The second level of analysis looks at the changes on Isla Margarita as having their origin in national political and economic policies. The island does not stand alone, but is part of the state of Nueva Esparta, and is subject to the whims and proclivities of the national government.

The last level of analysis sees Isla Margarita as a part of the world system as envisioned by Wallerstein and as explicated by Cardoso and Falleto in their seminal work on dependency.

Dependency theory grew out of a critique of modernization theory and a realization of the failure of import substitution policies put in place in Latin America in response to the Great Depression and WWII. It is best known for its conceptual division of the world into two spheres, that of the developed sector, or the core, and that of the underdeveloped sector, the periphery. Sometimes, depending on who one quotes, there will be the inclusion of the semi-periphery. Dependency theory is based on the view that due to the

nature of the growth of capitalism since the 1500's, parts of the world became the core, others the underdeveloped periphery.

I include dependency as an approach to sociocultural change because it deals with a particular historical question of change: how the development of underdevelopment transpired. It also broaches the questions of why development - economic change - has not occurred in the Third World as predicted by modernization theorists.

I will the work *Dependency and Development in Latin America* as a means of explicating dependency theory because I find Cardoso and Faletto's analysis more dynamic than many other and more amenable to anthropological concerns. Cardoso and Faletto address the problem of "underdevelopment" in Latin America by a process of discovery that employs the *perspective* of dependency. That is, their work is not a *theory* in the sense of having a set of hypotheses that it tests, but rather a "demonstration of an interpretation," (p.xiv). Such an interpretation is holistic because it considers more than one dimension of a system. Economy is not divorced from social structures, nor are politics studied as simple expressions of consensus or dissent. Furthermore, history gives this holistic analysis depth and character.

Cardoso and Faletto's strong historical interpretation sets them apart from other earlier versions of dependency. These earlier interpretations ("stagnationist") focused on showing how central capitalist economies, primarily the United States, kept countries of the periphery in a dependent, and therefore underdeveloped state. These renditions of dependency were static, linear and unidimensional, not to mention tautological. The center was seen to exploit the periphery by appropriating the surplus generated by its capitalist expansion in the periphery. Such a condition was maintained

because of the inherent characteristics of capital formation and expansion. There were only two elements at play, the external and the internal - or the center and the periphery. The grounded historical facts considered were few, limited to the admission that Latin America began as a colony, a political and economic status which acted to fix its unequal and underdeveloped position for the following 500 years.

Cardoso and Faletto (along with later *dependentistas*) sought to enrich and enliven the perspective of dependency in Latin America. This is accomplished by employing a methodology the authors term "historical-structural." To quote:

We conceive the relationship between external and internal forces as forming a complex whole whose structural links are not based on mere external forms of exploitation and coercion, but are rooted in coincidences of interests between local dominant classes and international ones, and, on the other side, are challenged by local dominated groups and classes.

This interpretation of the structure of dependency escapes Bottomore's criticism of dependency. He states that "...The extraction of of surplus product is analyzed in the context of countries, with little reference to classes, whereas in fact the production and subsequent appropriation of a surplus product is an aspect of the relationship between classes," (p. 115). Cardoso and Faletto emphatically stress the importance of class analysis in understanding the process of dependency, underdevelopment, and dependent development (or "associated dependent development). Throughout the entire work, the role of class conflict and class cohesion is examined, and done in a particularly (for me) stimulating manner.

By using the concept of the dialectic, Cardoso and Faletto demonstrate how dependent relationships form through the integration (articulation?) of international and national classes. Each country has a unique set of historical

circumstances that "filter" alternatives to development or dependency, or some other socioeconomic formation. They state, " In spite of structural determination, there is room for alternatives in history," (p. xi). How does this happen? Through class conflict.

Cardoso and Faletto reject the notion that dependency emanates only from an external domination of the internal. "Dependence should no longer be considered an 'external variable'; its analysis should be based on the relations between the different social classes within the dependent nations themselves," (p. 22). The internal social formations are engaged in a process of domination and exploitation. Because domination is not static, the social formations, i.e., the ruling classes, shift according to different classes' demands of the moment. These shifts condition the historical path one nation will take as contrasted with another.

Cardoso and Faletto take great pains to illustrate the different historical events that led each Latin American nation to its world position in the 1970's. Compared to a purely descriptive account of Latin American history, Cardoso and Faletto *interpret* history as they recount it. As politics are seen to be the juncture between the articulation of economics and the social relations in a society, the authors interpret a *political* history. The understanding gained from this methodology is one that helps to explain the formation of different classes at different periods in time. For example, there is the period of "outward expansion" when the traditional elites, composed of *latifundistas*, must join their power with emerging classes of technocrats and industrialists. How this merger is negotiated varies from country to country, as each nation has different historical conditions. Crucial to the outcome is whether or not the country has been primarily defined by enclave economics or a national control of the export system. The internal classes are thus affected (but not

totally controlled) by the type of relationship they have had with external classes of capitalists. Hence these countries may develop, but only in an "associated dependence."

The criticism of Cardoso and Faletto's approach to class analysis is serious. While they describe the emergence of new classes, they do not give much, if any, concrete attention to the actual relations between classes. Consider this explanation given about how new "social divisions of work" came about (p.128):

Countries that began to grow in these ways [growth of the economy's private sector and heavy state participation in new basic industries and infrastructure] underwent a demographic-ecological transformation as a proletariat emerged and as a non-wage-earning popular sector developed in the cities. The growth rate of the latter sector usually was higher than the rate at which new jobs were generated by industrialization. This brought about the formation in Latin America of what came to be called 'mass urban societies' in insufficiently industrialized economies."

What is a "demographic-ecological transformation?" This phrase is left unexplained. Neither is there mention of rural-urban migration, of different trajectories of land reform or appropriation that may encourage the growth of migration, nor mention of swelling populations, etc. What was occurring between traditional rural elites and peasants that caused new "mass urban societies" to spring up in Latin America?

Much of this criticism may be answered by remembering that Cardoso and Faletto are describing a "perspective" (or approach) for interpretation and not a theory of underdevelopment. As such, broad and sweeping views of class formation and conflict are allowable. But then, just how useful is this work for conducting further research of development in Latin America? In particular, is this perspective useful for anthropological research? My answer is a forceful "yes," modified by an important qualification.

Since Boas and his view of "cultural particularism," anthropology has grappled with the question of how useful is the concept of cultural relativism. The logic of this relativistic approach is that no human behavior is subject to rules of prediction because all behavior is relative to cultural conditions. The incest taboo seemed to be the only cross-cultural concept not subject to the "But in Tepotzlán they do it like this" argument.

In the subdiscipline of economic anthropology there arose in the 1960's the debate of formalism versus substantivism. Briefly, this debate is linked to relativistic arguments in that substantivists were (and are) convinced that economies across cultures must be interpreted by their own inner logics. Formalists claimed (and claim) that principles of neoclassical economics apply equally to Melanesian trading circles as well as the workings of Detroit's automobile industries. Modernization theory is similar to the formalist position in that it holds that economic development proceeds along predictable paths regardless of geographic location or culture. Similar to formalism, there emerged the clashing of dependency theory against the gates of modernization theory.

The qualification that comes from employing a dependency perspective in anthropological inquiry is in regard to levels of analysis. Dependency is a concept that is concerned with abstractions - nations, capitalistic expansion, international classes. How the interactions of these abstractions affect local, specific expressions of inequality is rarely dealt with by Cardoso and Faletto. Anthropologists gather their data from the ground up, not vice versa. Keeping all this in mind, I present the case of Isla Margarita in the light of Cardoso and Faletto's theories.

Review of the Methods Employed During Fieldwork

My fieldwork began in late January, 1992. I was in the field continuously until the end of December, 1992, when I returned to Gainesville, Florida until May, 1993, returning to live on the island and staying until August, 1994. During the first part of my study I was funded by a Fulbright Doctoral Dissertation Grant. The second part of my field work was self-funded, that is, I worked both as a English professor at the University of Carabobo's Porlamar extension, and at the University of the Fundación La Salle in Punta de Piedras. I also worked in the wholesale and retail marketing of fresh fish caught by Margariteño fishermen. All of this was participant observation at its best and its worst.

Living as I did, I was able to go fishing with the fishermen, and stay up all night waiting on the beach for their boats to bring the catch in. I learned about icing down fish and which species spoils the quickest. I learned to hawk fish from a truck while passing down the streets of Fuentidueño, and how to haggle with the old women who had stalls in the market at Los Conejeros. I experienced firsthand what it feels like to be cheated out of a fair price for your fish, and how economically devastating losing just one night's catch can be. Being pregnant and giving birth in the public hospital in Porlamar gave me closer contact and acceptance among the women on the island, and allowed me to see what it was like to be poor and have to provide for a little baby.

Much of what I did in the field was opportunistic and my original research plan had to be revised to fit the circumstances. I had wanted to do a comparative study of a "traditional fishing community" that was more or less untouched by tourism and then find one that was right in the thick of tourism development. But that proved difficult: communities like that did

not exist on a clearcut plane, and if so, their economies and histories were too alike to allow a fair and productive comparison. After discussing the problem with numerous other researchers on the island and visiting practically every fishing village on Isla Margarita and Isla de Coche, I decided to focus my work in La Galera. La Galera was specifically chosen because of its proximity to Juan Griego, a town geared completely now to the freeport economy and just a fifteen minute walk away, its nascent tourism development, and because it is a traditional fishing village. The problem in La Galera was to determine what impact the the freeport and subsequent international tourism developments had had on this small fishing-based community.

I moved to La Galera in March of 1992. I conducted a census and later, two household economic surveys. I lived in La Galera continuously until the end of July, 1992, when I was in a serious car accident and moved to Las Marvaes outside of Punta de Piedras to recuperate. While this site was not really chosen but presented serendipitously, it offered an opportunity to compare diachronically the changes that had occurred since Orona had conducted his fieldwork there in the mid-1960s.

By that time I had already decided that I could not be satisfied looking at simply one fishing community experiencing low-intensity tourism development. I felt confident that I might better be able to tell the story of the island if I looked at it as a whole. I saw the island as small enough to handle in some way, not completely in depth for every aspect, but enough to analyze the the most important changes occurring. I saw the engine of change as beginning with the freeport, being centered in Porlamar, then in the spread of helter-skelter tourism. This radiated out from Porlamar and had varying impacts on different parts of the island. I wanted to see how the changes were occurring at these various levels. I see Porlamar as the seat of free port

generated tourism, and the commercial center of the "new" Isla Margarita. The city served as the most convenient location from which to conduct archival research since from there one can catch a *por puesto* to literally anywhere on the island. Furthermore, I wanted to conduct an owner/employee survey of the duty-free stores, and living in Porlamar facilitated that work.

I did not conduct fieldwork in the traditional sense of picking one village or town and doing a complete description or analysis of the events occurring within its boundaries. Rather, being on an island, I chose to see the whole island as the unit of study. This posed its own difficult problems, mostly of time and the ability of one person to tackle such a project. But as noted earlier in this chapter, on the island everything is affected by everything else: inhabitants of Punta de Piedras work at the airport, those of La Galera attend the Festival of the Virgen del Valle, and everyone everywhere shops in Porlamar. As such, everyone and everything is connected; even the women of San Francisco de Macanao are employed in the duty-free stores of Porlamar, as are many of the townspeople of the *pueblos* of Chacachacare, Santa Maria, Las Hernandez, etc. I spent the most amount of time however, in Juan Griego, La Galera, Porlamar, and Punta de Piedras and its smaller satellite communities. The most populous and tourist-impacted areas of Isla Margarita received the least amount of conscious study.

Summary of the Chapters

The focus of the research is to analyze the impacts that the introduction of a economic regime of a freeport and the subsequent development of national and international tourism has had on the local population of the

island. This was done through employing the methods of participant observation, in-depth interviews with key persons on the island, archival and library research. Various surveys were conducted, one as a household survey of the fishing village, La Galera, a household economic survey of selected units in the same village, another other of a random sample of the duty-free stores of the towns of Porlamar and Juan Griego, and a survey of the tourist-oriented businesses in La Galera and Playa Caribe. All of the surveys operated under the assumption that outside of some fairly insignificant regional differences, the subjects interviewed were a good representation of like parts of the rest of Isla Margarita.

This chapter describes the problems of using tourism as a tool for economic development in traditional rural communities, particularly in the Third World. It recounts the history of the development of tourism globally, and reviews the pertinent literature treating the subject. Finally, this chapter has described some of the known cultural, economic and environmental impacts that tourism as a form of development has had on different host communities.

Chapter Two gives a geographic and demographic overview of Isla Margarita, focusing on what the island is like today, in the 1990s. The physical environment and how it has influenced life styles on the island is described. The chapter also looks at population movements in the past and present, and where the centers of demographic concentration are now located.

Chapter Three gives a historical overview of Isla Margarita. A picture of daily life in Isla Margarita as it was in the years leading up to the opening of the *zona franca* in 1971 is set out. To specify more precisely the time period is not possible, as the majority of my sources for this material are vague on dates, saying simply "before the free port" or using the words "*Margarita de*

antaño " (Margarita of before) to define what was and is no longer. However, there is a series of synchronic studies by North American social scientists that can be employed to trace what has occurred on the island since the mid-1950's. These are Fajardo's People, by McCorkle, done in 1953 but published in 1965; a 1958 geographical work, The Geography of Margarita and Adjacent Islands, Venezuela, by Alexander; The Social Organization of Margariteño Fishermen, by Raymond Orona, based on field research in 1964; and most recently, *Small Town, Big Hell*, a 1992 dissertation based on ten years of fieldwork by Cooke. There are also numerous studies done by islanders themselves, in the majority historical works, or collections of Margariteño folklore.

Chapter Four is a description of the events that led up to the implementation of the regime of the freeport on Isla Margarita, and what has developed since its beginning in 1975. Pertinent results of the freeport store survey are presented in this chapter. Chapter Five also looks at the rise of international and national tourism, and analyzes what impacts this has had on the islanders. Part of the current problem facing Isla Margarita is the national economic crisis that is threatening the very existence of tourism and its continued healthy growth on the island.

Chapters Five through Nine document the impacts the changing of the economic base has had on the the culture of the Margariteños. Chapter Five looks at the the material culture - the house forms and structures, the difference in housing between upper, middle, and lower class Margariteños. It also describes the material culture of everyday life, from television to kitchenwares.

Chapter Six is important in that it documents how the various amenities of everyday island life have been changed since the coming of the

freeport and tourism. Specifically, it looks at changes in the water supply, sewage and garbage disposal, transportation networks, electrical supply and finally, the current housing shortage that has beset islanders, from rich to poor.

In Chapter seven, I show how the cultural institutions such as the system of *compadrazgo* and the social control behavior called *respeto* have changed since 1971. Changes in the roles of men and women are also analyzed, showing that women have not benefitted as may have been expected, and are now working the "double shift," by day in the wage market and by evening in their home taking care of their family.

Chapter Eight is an analysis of what were the major forms of economy on Isla Margarita before the coming of the freeport and how those forms, especially fishing and the work of women, have changed since the early 1970s. While the actual technical practice of artesanal fishing has changed little due to the rise of commercialism and tourism, it is threatened by the both in competition for the natural resource base. Women's work has gone from being home-based and self-owned to being wage-based and performed mostly in shops or other third-party establishments.

Chapter Nine deals with two other social institutions, that of religion expression and politics. While almost all Margariteños consider themselves to be Catholic, they are but nominally Catholic, and have created their own syncretic religion that combines elements from Africa and the indigenous Guayquerí Indians. This form of syncretic religious expression is similar to what the religious practices on the mainland of Venezuela, but the island has developed it's own distinct variation. I look both at the expression of this syncretism in the practice of *brujería* and in the cultural intensification and

reaffirmation of self-concept represented in the annual festival of the Virgen del Valle.

Chapter Ten is the concluding chapter. In summary, I explain how the island of Margarita, once quite homogenous culturally and economically, has now become an entity one can analyze at three levels. One can look at the manner in which the island now articulates with the global marketplace through commerce (licit and illicit) and international tourism. One can also see how national policies, politics and intrigue have come to buffet and affect what happens on this once-forgotten Caribbean island. Lastly, there are all the local forces and responses, such as are seen in the chapter on politics or water shortages, that guide the island down its own particular path of development.

There are also three different spheres of life now on Isla Margarita itself. There is the cosmopolitan and upper class sphere that exists from Playa del Agua on the northeastern coast and runs down to Porlamar. Then there is the middle class sphere, spread out around the eastern portion of the island, and made up of a good many immigrants from Caracas, the Middle East, and Europe. Lastly, there are the more marginal communities of the lowland arid western part of the island, comprised of fishermen and petty capitalists. They form a sort of satellite population around the bustle and energy of Porlamar. They have been less affected by the development than others of the island, and what future they have remains the most uncertain of all.

This study is an attempt to grasp what Isla Margarita is on all the different levels of the island community's existence. Bringing out certain elements of island life, such as the religious festival of the Virgen del Valle, or the housing shortages, or the demographics of the shopgirls of the free port

in in Porlamar is one way of treating Isla Margarita anthropologically. It is not the only way to understand what is taking place on the island in the 1990s, but it is the way I chose to follow.

CHAPTER 2 GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF THE ISLAND

Geography of Isla Margarita

Isla Margarita, together with the two smaller islands of Coche and Cubagua, form what is now the state of Nueva Esparta. Margarita is the largest island of the three, encompassing 941 square kilometers, and extending approximately 33 kilometers at its longest point. The island lies in the Caribbean Sea 33 kilometers at its closest point off the main Venezuelan coast at longitude 11 North and latitude 64 West (see Figure 2.1).

Many geographers have described Isla Margarita as really two islands, Margarita proper to the east and the Peninsula of Macanao, to the west ¹. The two "islands" are joined by a broad sandy isthmus and mangrove lagoon known as La Arestinga ². The eastern portion of Isla Margarita is both arid and lush, with a small mountain chain, El Oriental, beginning at its center and running up the eastern coast, within which lie valleys of fruit trees and a few small streams. Alexander describes these mountains as "...bulky, with steep broad slopes and blunt , angular crowns," (1958:87). The highest peak in the chain is the Pico de San Juan at 952 meters, with the Cerro de Copei rising to 890 meters. There are three small rivers (*riachuelos*), the San Juan, the

¹ Unless otherwise specified, "Margarita" will refer to both the eastern and western portions of the island.

² Current popular usage has dropped the 'a,' writing the name as La Restinga. The pronunciation remains the same.

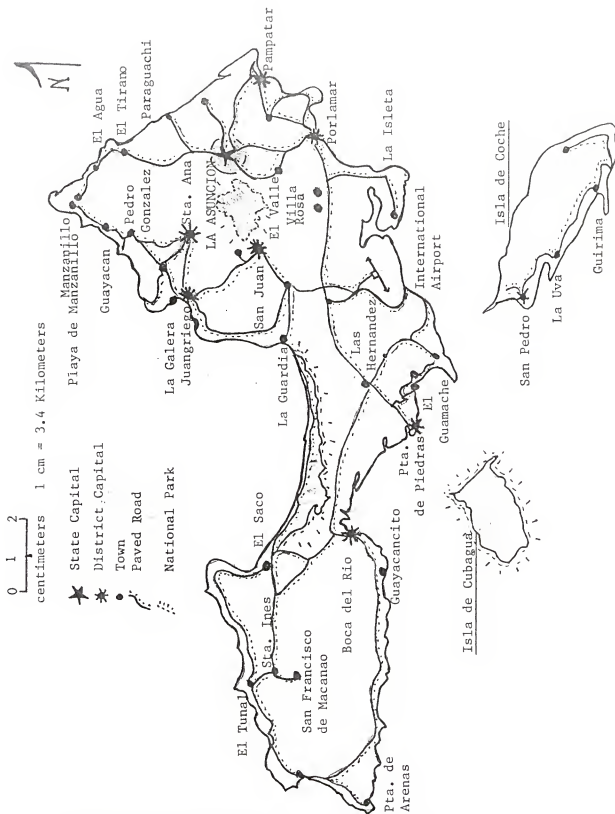


Fig. 2.1 Map of Isla Margarita, Coche and Cubagua

Asunción, and El Valle, but during the dry seasons the first two disappear and the latter becomes but a trickle running through the city of Porlamar.

Out of the mountains the landscape becomes desert-like, with yellow and orange rocky soils, various types of cacti, and scarce water. To the west this geographical characteristic intensifies as one nears the Peninsula of Macanao where the washes of golden-brown colors are interrupted only once by the verdant tumbles of mangroves lining La Restinga's lagoon. Reaching Macanao, the skyline is dominated with jagged, sharp and tall mountain peaks, the Sierra Occidental, or Los Cerros de Macanao. Its highest peak is the Cerro de San Francisco (or Los Cedros) at 740 meters. Here the terrain is often almost barren of vegetation save for scatterings of *cardones*, which are tall and candelabra-shape (*Cereus* sp.), and *tuna* cacti (*Opuntia*).

Island vegetation varies widely depending on the location: mangroves, xerophytic cacti, rain forest trees, fruit trees, flowers and vines, and what is commonly called scrub brush. Characteristically of a desert, after it rains the arid parts of the island literally change colors, from brown, yellow and ochre to succulent green and velvet blue.

According to Alexander, the aridity of the island is not due to natural climatic occurrences but was brought about by the overgrazing of livestock, primarily goats, although in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cattle was numerous also. Isla Margarita was actually the point of introduction of cattle to Venezuela, being introduced by the Spaniards and bred successively through the generations (1958:107-108).

Wildlife on the island consists mostly of various species of birds, from the tiny hummingbird to the large brown pelican, lizards and iguanas, various species of snakes including rattlesnakes, small rodents, rabbits, and a small deer similar to those once native to Key West, Florida. Insects abound

despite the dryness, and range from poisonous centipedes, scorpions, and spiders to the less dangerous but still annoying cockroaches, mosquitoes, sand fleas, gnats .

The climate of the island is typical of the Caribbean basin, however the quantity of rainfall is very low, being similar to the islands of Curaçao and Bonaire. This aridity is due to various physical conditions described by Orona (1969:15-16):

"...The cause of the aridity is mainly the result of atmospheric stability over the island. The atmospheric stability is caused by trade wind inversion which is a layer of surface air 2 to 3 kilometers thick topped by a layer of warm, dry, and stable air. The inversion acts as a lid preventing convective currents to the lower layer of air. A concomitant factor is the alignment of the north-central coast of South America with the trade winds. The trade winds approach the coast with a relatively weak inversion. Consequently precipitation over Trinidad and the mainland to the south is substantial. However there is relatively low pressure over the continent which causes the trade winds to accelerate. And the difference in surface friction between land and sea is also a factor. These two factors, compounded by the divergence of air at the surface cause a subsidence and warming of the high air and an intensification of the trade wind inversion. The strong inversion reduces the convective action and increases the atmospheric stability over Margarita Island. The total result is the arid condition which prevails on the island."

As will be seen in later chapters, this characteristic aridity of the island has constrained and shaped the life and culture of the island, not only in the past but in the present, where lack of water is one of the major challenges faced by islanders.

To the newcomer there appears to be little seasonality on Isla Margarita, but there are subtle climatic variations. Most notable are the changes between the wet and dry seasons and the barely perceptible changes

in temperature throughout the year. Isla Margarita has four "seasons:" a hot, windy and dry spring, from February to June, a wetter summer from late June to August, another very hot dry spell lasting through September and October, and finally a rainy and notably cooler winter period from November to February. The average yearly temperature is 25° Celsius, with lows around 12° Celsius in December, and highs around 37° Celsius in August. Because the island lies in the path of the easterly trade winds, the coastal areas are usually cooled by the breezes, and in the interior eastern valleys the days are warm but pleasant.

Inhabitants of Isla Margarita are very susceptible to the changes in temperature and rainfall throughout the year. While I was relieved by the cooler temperatures of the winter, residents complain that "it's cold" and do not hesitate to don sweaters and jackets, although the temperature is still around 20° Celsius. Rain is also seen as chilling and somewhat dangerous to one's health; many children are kept home from school if the day dawns wet. After my daughter was born, I was continually admonished to not take her out at night into the "cold" air (*el sereno*) lest she become ill, or if it was a bit cloudy and my daughter wasn't bundled up warmly I was chastised for letting her "freeze", even though everyone else was sweating.

Reading through my field notes I am struck by just how many times islanders and I discussed the weather: it was so hot, or so dry and dusty, or so horribly windy, or so rainy that there were innumerable electrical blackouts. As in the rest of the world, at least those that are not shielded by central air-conditioning and heat, the weather guides the daily round of activities. Most people on the island are up very early, at least in the fishing villages, where to get up after seven a.m. is considered lazy. The simple reasons are because until recently most villages on the coast were involved in fishing and

fishermen are usually landing their catches by four a.m. Also, by ten or eleven in the morning the heat makes any kind of work uncomfortable. Unless one works in Porlamar in a store or other office-like environment, the chances of controlling one's workday through the invention of air-conditioning are slim. If a family has any extra cash, they may own a window air-conditioner that is usually installed in a bedroom. Most of these air-conditioning units are ten to fifteen years old, having been bought during the boom decade after the opening of the freeport. Few middle and lower class Margariteños could afford to now buy such a luxury good.

Most stores and banks will close from noon to two or three p.m. each day. They then re-open and stay open until six or seven, sometimes eight p.m. The daily siesta may be used to go home, eat a large lunch, and play with the children, tryst with a lover, or conduct other business if one is in Porlamar. In Porlamar, times are changing and businesses, particularly banks, are starting to copy the Western world's habits of conducting business at all hours--they have introduced *tiempo corrido*, or a nonstop schedule, staying open through the siesta and then closing earlier.

Settlement Patterns and Demography

The geography of Isla Margarita has strongly affected the way the population has been distributed, both in the past and today. The Peninsula of Macanao has always been relatively unpopulated due to its extreme aridity and barren desert landscape. Until 1992 only the town of Boca del Río had running water, with the remaining settlements relying on privately owned water trucks to supply their needs. Most of the villages in Macanao are completely geared towards fishing, except perhaps San Francisco de Macanao, where the inhabitants, living in a more lush valley, practice some small-scale agriculture. In the past the peninsula was also known for its large herds of

goats. But the eastern portion of Isla Margarita has been the hub of people, settlement and commerce simply because the area is more inhabitable in terms of climate, water, and opportunities for small-scale farming and livestock raising. This fact holds true into the 1990s.

In contrast to the size and climate of Margarita, the two smaller islands of Cubagua and Coche have played a smaller role in the area's development. Coche is most noted for fishing and its salt flats. These flats figured prominently in the fishing economy of not only Isla Margarita, but also in the coastal villages of the mainland, providing the salt used to preserve fishing catches. Today, fish is still salted, but in much smaller quantities, the majority being refrigerated until sold. Coche was also the proposed site of a larger tourist resort, and the hotel was built, but problems of water supply and corruption have, for the time, stopped its development. It consists only of a smaller resort hotel equipped with a restaurant and bar.

Cubagua today serves mostly as a base camp for artesanal fishermen from Punta de Piedras and neighboring areas. While the tiny island was once the setting for Nueva Cádiz (it is now a national historical landmark), one of the first Spanish settlements in South America, it is now not permanently inhabited. It has no natural water sources, and the fishermen who stay at the camps must constantly bring water in large plastic containers. In 1990, the island was also the proposed site of a very large tourist resort to be built by a consortium of Spanish, Japanese and Venezuelan firms. The plans had to be abandoned in the face of pressures from preservationists both within Venezuela and internationally (Gomez L. 1991).

Margarita is an island and this fact alone has had one of the strongest effects upon the population's economic and cultural development. It has served to both isolate and link the people in various ways to others. The

island has been a refuge for pirates, including the infamous Lope de Aguirre, and a focus of their pillaging. It served as a temporary hide-out for Simón Bolívar during the war for independence from Spain. The ocean's pearls have brought times of riches, and being an island, it has also been in the path of hurricanes.

Most recently, until reliable ferry service began in the 1960s, the water served as a boundary against the modern world, and against the islander's partaking in its bounties. Much of the culture of the people was then geared toward some sort of seafaring life, be it fishing, interisland trading, and always, always, smuggling (Subero 1988).

Until the implementation of the *zona franca* in 1971 and then the change to freeport status in 1975, Margarita truly languished as a pretty but forgotten Caribbean island that just happened to be a part of Venezuela. Margariteños were well known in other areas of their country because of their penchant for immigration to search for work, and Isla Margarita was famous in Venezuelan folklore for its heroes of the Wars of Independence. But few Venezuelans went to Margarita just to visit or vacation unless they had relatives there, and even then, accustomed to the life of the city, found the island very backward, quaint and too quiet.

From the 1920s until the mid-1970s, the population size of the island stayed low, and some years registered no increase in the numbers of inhabitants or even a loss in population. Table 2.1 shows clearly a great decrease in the island's population between 1936 and 1941—5.6%—due to islanders leaving for work primarily in the oil fields (this is also the time of the Great Depression, which must have also taken a toll on the already precarious economy of Isla Margarita). Then, between 1971 and 1981 there is a decade of incredible growth, and if seen from 1961, one notes a 220% absolute

growth rate, or a doubling of the island's population in less than 20 years (Abreu 1984:53).

Table 2.1 Population, Density and Growth Rates on Isla Margarita, 1873-1990

Census Year	: Population	Density (pers/Km ²)	Absolute	Growth Rates	
				Relative (%)	Annual Rate Geometric (%)
1873	30,983	26.9	-----	----	----
1881	37,583	32.7	6,600	21.3	2.6
1891	40,197	35.0	2,614	7.0	0.7
1920	56,035	48.7	15,838	39.4	1.2
1926	69,392	60.3	13,357	23.8	3.6
1936	73,375	63.8	3,983	5.7	0.5
1941	69,195	60.2	-4,180	-5.7	-1.2
1950	75,899	66.0	6,704	9.7	1.0
1961	89,492	77.8	13,593	17.9	1.6
1971	118,830	103.3	29,338	32.8	2.7
1981	197,198	171.5	78,368	65.9	5.2
1990	263,748	229.3	66,550	33.7	3.3

OCEI, El Censo 90 en Nueva Esparta, p. 16.

As Table 2.2 shows, the migratory flows in the 1920s through the 1950s or so, affected the ratio of men to women, and with so many men leaving the island, there was a great disparity in the number of females per males. This, as I explain later in Chapter Seven, may have contributed to the pattern of what Cooke terms "low male salience" and the legendary *mujer trabajadora* (hard-working woman) of Isla Margarita (Cook 1992).

The people of Isla Margarita and Coche are mestizo, having descended from the Spanish, the Guayqueri Indians who were the pre-columbian inhabitants, and African slaves. The slaves were later brought to the island via other Caribbean islands by the Spanish to exploit the pearl beds. In the past, before the changes in population patterns brought on by the freeport, islanders claim that every region of the island boasted people of a distinct

Table 2.2 Age Structure of the Population According to Sex, Median Age and Sex Ratios, Censuses of 1990 to 1950

Sex and Age Groupings Median Age Sex Ratios	Years of the Census				
	1990	1981	1971	1961	1950
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-14	36.2	38.9	43.8	45.5	43.3
15-64	59.0	55.9	50.2	48.7	50.8
65 and older	4.8	5.2	6.0	5.8	5.9
Men	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-14	36.5	39.6	46.5	49.4	48.6
15-64	59.6	56.2	48.7	45.8	46.2
65 and older	3.9	4.2	4.8	4.8	5.2
Women	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-14	36.0	38.3	41.2	41.9	38.9
15-64	58.3	55.5	51.6	51.3	54.6
65 and older	5.7	6.2	7.2	6.8	6.5
Median Age	21.6	20.0	17.9	17.3	18.5
Sex Ratio (men to women)	102.7	101.4	95.3	88.8	83.3

OCEI, El Censo 90 en Nueva Esparta, p.17.

physiognomy, and a distinct pattern of speaking. Although the differences are hard to discern nowadays, they are still there in the shadows, among the elders. The great majority of Margariteños have a light brown skin tone, dark eyes, and dark brown to black curling hair. The most outstanding physical difference noted among the Margariteños is between many of those in Macanao and islanders from the eastern island. Many from Macanao have blond hair and blue or green eyes, but the same darker skin tone of the other Margariteños. Islanders explain this difference by claiming that some Spanish had settled in Macanao and later had little interaction with the rest of Margarita. It may well be a case of genetic drift but I do not know how far back it dates. Margariteños often describe themselves as *trigueño*, or the color of toasted wheat. Those of darker skin tone are referred to affectionately as "*negro/a*," and those very blond or light-skinned as "*catire/a*." No one that

I talked to expressed and wish to be lighter-skinned than they were. Many, in fact, felt very sorry for me and other light-skinned visitors because - outside of aesthetical reasons - of the damage the sun could so easily do to our skins.

While different racial characteristics are acknowledged by Venezuelans, there is no racism as it is expressed in the United States. Still it is very obvious that the lightest-skinned, i.e., white, Venezuelans dominate the elite classes in the country. From the government to the television commercials, the faces seen are not brown, but overwhelmingly white. Discrimination is not institutionalized, and any case of barring black Venezuelans from some activity or location is quickly denounced at all levels of society. However, the darkest-skinned Venezuelans are seen as different somehow, and any black tourists were always seen by Margariteños as objects of great interest and sometimes derision. The majority of the first large groups of tourists to come to Margarita to shop in the freeport were from Trinidad, and to this day some shop-owners and taxicab drivers speak with a tone of disgust about them, claiming they are "smelly people" (*gente hedionda*). And yet, in December 1992, when the new mayor of Caracas was elected, everyone remarked that it was the first time they remembered a black man making it into such a powerful political position.

In his book *Café con Leche: Race, Class and National Image in Venezuela* (1990), Wright explores the history of racial relations in Venezuela. He shows how in Venezuela, since Independence to the present, black Venezuelans have been treated and portrayed. He shows that race does not manifest itself as it does in the United States but that neither is Venezuela truly colorblind. Wright (1990:131) concludes at the end:

All things considered, Venezuelans deserve recognition for having overcome the seamiest aspects of race relations.

Venezuela's *pardos* [mestizos] comprise a majority and operate openly in a society that accepts them as they appear. Their multiracial origins do not hold them back. Nor do they have to deal with questions of racial pluralism on a daily basis. As for whites, they have an option. They can retreat to exclusive clubs and cliques and ignore the gains of other racial groups, or they can acknowledge their belief that they live in a racial democracy, secure that in any case they set the norms for cultural advancement. Only blacks realize the full implications of the lingering prejudice that operates below the surface. They, probably more than any other racial group in Venezuela, realize that Venezuelans want only a little *café* with their *leche*.

All islanders speak Spanish as their first and usually only language.

While English is taught from the primary school grades upward, the practical success of this program is limited. Even with the constant waves of European and Canadian tourism, I met extremely few persons who had a comfortable command of English, or even German.

Orona (1968) notes that Margariteños speak a more clipped Spanish than in other Latin American countries, and that they often switch the "l" for an "r" (untrilled) sound and vice versa. An example would be "er hombre" and "la mujer" instead of "el hombre" and "la mujer." It is also common belief that those of eastern coastal Venezuela speak the fastest Spanish, and that the Margariteños are the fastest of the lot. My personal experience validates this claim. During my first two months on the island I was constantly struggling to keep up and found radio and news programs incomprehensible. However, in the next couple of months I found myself losing patience and finishing sentences for visitors from Caracas, who Margariteños believe speak slowly.

Table 2.3 shows how the population has been distributed around the island since 1950. Isla Margarita remained relatively rural until the 1970s when there began the population explosion that continued into the 1990s. In

the 1950s only 33.9% of the population was considered urban (defined as towns of 2,500 or more inhabitants); the rest of Venezuela had reached that level of urbanization by approximately 1936 (Suárez and Torrealba 1979:292). By 1961 the rest of the nation had an urbanization rate of 67.5%, while Isla Margarita still lagged around 47.2%. Then comes the rapid change, and by 1990 one can see that the island has been almost totally urbanized, at 93.8%.

Table 2.3 Total Population, according to Area and Selected Urban Locales, 1990-1950

Areas and Urban Centers	1990		1981		Censuses 1971		1961		1950	
		%		%		%		%		%
Total (100%)	263,748		197,198		118,830		89,492		75,899	
Urban Area	247,331	93.8	157,657	79.9	68,065	57.3	42,220	47.2	25,713	33.9
Localities										
Porlamar	62,732	23.8	51,079	25.9	31,985	26.9	21,787	24.4	14,769	19.4
Villa Rosa	23,323	8.8	10,849	5.5	----	0.0	----	0.0	----	0.0
San Juan	17,237	6.5	11,635	5.9	----	0.0	----	0.0	----	0.0
La Asunción	16,552	6.3	10,375	5.3	6,334	5.3	5,517	6.2	4,510	5.9
Paraguachí	13,756	5.2	4,258	2.2	----	0.0	----	0.0	----	0.0
Juangriego	13,024	4.9	6,691	3.4	6,062	5.1	4,505	5.0	3,928	5.2
Pampatar	12,351	4.7	5,467	2.8	3,241	2.7	2,710	3.0	2,506	3.3
El Valle	9,209	3.5	7,367	3.7	----	0.0	----	0.0	----	0.0
Los Millanes	7,723	2.9	9,018	4.6	----	0.0	----	0.0	----	0.0
Pta.de Piedras	7,168	2.7	4,058	2.1	2,826	2.4	----	0.0	----	0.0
Boca del Río	6,494	2.5	4,749	2.4	3,475	2.9	2,645	3.0	----	0.0
Rural Area	16,417	6.2	39,541	20.1	50,765	42.7	47,272	52.8	50,186	66.1

Source: OCEI: El Censo 90 en Nueva Esparta, p.19

To begin, Porlamar has been, since at least the turn of the century, the primary commercial and population center on the island. It has surpassed the islands' capital, La Asunción, both in size and importance. La Asunción is the legislative seat of Nueva Esparta and a few government offices are located there also. However, it maintains its colonial-era ambiance, with many cobbled streets, large old trees, and in general a rhythm completely

different from the rest of the frantic and helter-skelteredness of the other parts of Isla Margarita. It should be noted that La Asunción seems to have made an effort to maintain its "apartness" from the boom affects in felt in other areas of the island. This has been done by active disavowal of the commercialism that exists elsewhere on the island. Furthermore, there are no hotels, and perhaps only two restaurants geared toward the tourist sector. It is as if La Asunción is the "pure" Margarita, that which has been untainted by the tourist's gaze (to borrow from Urry 1988).

Villa Rosa is best seen as a bedroom community of Porlamar. With the boom brought on by the freeport, the demand for affordable housing for workers created Villa Rosa.³ Consisting at first of high-rise concrete block buildings, it has now tumbled and jumbled itself into being a bustling, full-service community that supplies a very large percentage of the persons that works in the shops and businesses in Porlamar. In late 1994, there was a new housing/community project, Villa Juana being constructed alongside Villa Rosa. The houses are government subsidized, and are very much needed by the lower and middle class workers of the island.

San Juan Bautista, or simply San Juan, is located farther to the west of Porlamar than Villa Rosa and in a famously fertile valley, and I included it in the table because of its precipitous growth in the years since the coming of the freeport. Noted primarily for its role in the war of independence, cattle raising and its production of a delicious candy called *piñonate*, made from green papaya, San Juan had only 1,568 inhabitants in 1971. San Juan has also

³ The story about the name of the community is interesting. Apparently the land on which the buildings are constructed belonged to a single middle-aged woman by the name of Rosa. She sold the land for what she considered a good price. Señora Rosa then went on to create her own legend in the annals of gambling, drinking, dancing and, in general, raising hell, until she died, destitute, in the late 1980s.

taken much of the population spillover from Porlamar. It has also attracted back home those Margariteños who had emigrated, and now have come home searching for work.

Paraguachí is another telling example of the demographic changes that the freeport has engendered. Paraguachí is located far up the northern coast from Porlamar. This is the coast that is being so rapidly developed by the "second wave," that of tourism (the "first wave" was freeport commercialism). Once a simple homogenous fishing village, it is now a "hot spot" for the hip and rich Europeans (many of whom are German) looking to buy real estate. The German influence is now strong, and along the main coastal road, German restaurants offering brautwurst and saurkraut abound, tempting one to nickname the area "Little Germany." Making such a name for itself, more and more young "off-island" Venezuelans are also settling in the town. Although I could not pursue it very far, I was told by two "old" families that real estate prices are soaring, and many of the older inhabitants are selling property to newcomers instead of passing it down in the family as is traditional.

This change in traditional land inheritance practices is seen most intensely in at least two cases documented in the local newspapers. Briefly, what occurs is that one family member will take it upon themselves to sell the property to outsiders, and then keep the profits for themselves. In the past it was understood that property was to be divided evenly among the the children. Even if one child stayed on the land, living in the house, all the children felt that they had a stake in the land. When opportunities to sell at a high profit have come along, some "owners" have sold, and ignored the rest of the family. Those who have been left out resort to lawyers to bring the cases before a judge. The land then sits in limbo, not belonging to the new

owner or the old until the judge decides. The judgement may be months, even years in coming. The stress put upon families is immense, and often physical violence has erupted. Furthermore, the buyer is usually kept from his or her investment until the judgement is final, leaving them without land and without money.

Pampatar is probably, for the 1990s, the most coveted location to live, vacation or have a second home on the island. In the late 1980s it became more or less an artist's colony, frequented both by younger Venezuelans and Europeans. It now sports many health food stores and five-star restaurants, art galleries, museums, libraries, and is the seat for FONDENE (Fondo para el Desarrollo del Estado de Nueva Esparta). The town's citizens seem more "eco-conscious" than in other parts of the island, and this goes well with the older, pro-traditional, pro-active Margariteños that have lived in Pampatar all their lives.

An example of this environmental conciousness, and of taking a stand came out when the town decided to convince the port authorities to force out the hundreds of sailboats that had come to anchor out in the harbor. These boats hailed from around the world, and as the town was cosmopolitan and pretty, and offered good anchorage, it became a very popular anchorage for sailors. Unfortunately, the town offered nowhere for boats to pump out any human waste from self-contained units, so the boats would just pump their wastes into the harbor. More than one hundred boats doing this every day posed a serious problem of sanitation. Beaches would become contaminated. After much protest by locals, the sailboats were made to leave. This of course soured the sailors on the island as a stopping off point, and some wrote to local tourism publications to protest. But the Pampatarenses held fast, and the sailboats moved to other areas, mostly to Juan Griego.

The entire development of the freeport and the outgrowth of mass tourism that has occurred on the island can be followed geographically along the eastern coastline of Isla Margarita. Beginning in Porlamar, development spread the city out in fits and starts. There was never any plan for growth or construction. Anyone who had the money, the land title and the initiative could open a store, a restaurant, or a curio shop. The two main commercial streets are now the Cuatro de Mayo and Santiago Mariño; before they were Calle Igualdad, which runs parallel to the water, and Calle Marina, which is on the waterfront and the site of the old marketplace. Growth has extended west along the Cuatro de Mayo, along the new Avenida Bolívar then northwest to Pampatar. Now anything on the coast and in between Porlamar in the south and Manzanillo at the island's northernmost tip is fair game for developers. A good deal of development has occurred around the long and broad beach called Playa El Agua, and some of the highest priced international resorts are now located there.

Turning the northern point of Isla Margarita, one passes the fishing village of Guayacán ⁴, the road is new, being opened in the very late 1980s. When I returned to the island in 1992 (I had come the first time in 1989) I believed that this was one of the most spectacular views the island had to offer: from high on the mountainside one looks down at the Valley of Pedro Gonzalez - empty, verdant and rolling out to shores lined with chunky mangroves colliding with the indigo and azure of the ocean. By the end of 1992 the mangroves were gone, replaced with a golf course, and the shores

⁴ In 1992 when searching for a field site, I had very much wanted to work in Guayacán. It seemed of manageable size for one researcher, and was in the path of tourism development, and had just become more accessible with the new road. But when I tried to gain permission to work and live there, the *cacique* of the village made it clear he wanted no more outsiders in his village. Because of his attitude, even the local marine biologists often gave up trying to collect information on fish catches there.

have been redesigned so as to form private little beaches to serve the exceedingly large new Spanish-owned hotel complex being built. While there were some protests and even sabotage (especially of the water lines) by Margariteños trying to stop the questionable development, by November 1995 it was readying to open to the public.

El Valle del Espíritu Santo is the Catholic heart and soul of Isla Margarita. The valley and its church of the Virgen del Valle are situated at the end of a long narrow road. Most of the town's growth has been along this roadway, and along some of the back hills leading up to the Cerro Copey. The Church and its Virgen are sacred to both the Margariteños and the people of Venezuela. More will be written about the town and the Virgen in Chapter Nine.

Juan Griego and Los Millanes, one of its "satellites," are different cases. While Juan Griego has grown, it has not grown as expected, or as its residents have hoped. Juan Griego had hoped (and still does) to rival Porlamar when the freeport was initiated, but history was against it. Porlamar has the tradition of being the commercial center of the island, and the area of densest population. It has also helped that the governor of the state for the years 1989 to 1996 has come from Los Robles, right outside Porlamar on the way to Pampatar, and has tended to help development more in his "home town."

However, a large and scenic four-lane highway was constructed to run from close to the international airport into Juan Griego. It was hoped that the road would help attract more businesses to the town, but this has not been the case. Since the political problems in the nation began in 1992, there has been a downturn in the numbers of national tourists visiting the island, and this has been harshly felt in Juan Griego. Many of the storekeepers who had duty-free shops have converted them to grocery/convenience stores or more

likely, gambling establishments. Although I did not do any investigations, the circumstances lead me to hypothesize that Los Millanes has lost population recently because of the generally dismal business situation in Juan Griego. Perhaps someday someone will undertake a study of the island's internal migration flows.

Lastly, Table 2.3 shows the town of Boca del Río, located at the entrance to the Peninsula of Macanao. The town began as a cattle and goat ranch, as did almost all of the peninsula's villages, and was not proclaimed a settlement until 1901, when the town also began to build its first Catholic chapel (Rosa Acosta 1984:41). Boca del Río has remained a fishing town up to the present, serving briefly as the island's ferry landing until 1960. It is almost completely unaffected by the tourism developments on the eastern edge of Margarita, and only a rare adventurous tourist drives through the town, usually to stock up on refreshments to take to La Restinga beach. The townspeople of Punta de Piedras and Boca del Río have had close ties, kin and otherwise: the towns are close by water. However with the advent of the automobile in the 1960s this closeness has not been as closely maintained.

The Field Sites

La Galera

La Galera is located right next to Juan Griego, separated from the larger town by a hill, on top of which sits the historical landmark of the Wars for Independence, El Fortín. . Briefly, it is still predominantly a fishing village, with about half of its working population being fishermen, the rest working in Juan Griego in tourist-related concerns. The pueblo was apparently inhabited in pre-colonial times by Guayqueri fishing families, and with the coming of the Spanish, little changed. There was also considerable worry,

notes Rosa Acosta, about smuggling in and out of the bay there, indicating that contraband also has a long history in La Galera (1984:85). In 1805, a Frenchman by the name of Juan Dubén lived there, still among a population of mostly Guayqueri. According to what I could learn locally, these Guayqueri possibly later moved to the area around El Tirano or closer to Pampatar in Los Cerritos and then, as noted by McCorkle (1965:35), when those indigenous communities were dissolved, some returned to settle in La Galera. There were only two families in La Galera that made it clear to me that they were true *indios*.

In 1920, a large influx of people moved to La Galera from Pampatar, led by Tomás Acosta, who built up a fishing *ranchería* and whose descendants were still there in 1992. In fact, the town is divided into two sometimes contentious factions, those who hail from Pampatar and claim to be the "true" Galerenses and better fishermen, and those who arrived a few years later from around the town of La Guardia ⁵.

By 1950 there were 45 fishing ranchos, of the thatched roof and open-sided construction type, and 269 inhabitants. In 1954, propelled by the government of Pérez Jimenez, the ranchos were burnt down and replaced with adobe houses which were said to be more hygienic. Those houses still stand today, somewhat modified, but still in good repair. In 1961 there were 47 houses and 227 inhabitants. By 1981 there were 427 people living in La Galera, in 37 houses and five fishing ranchos. However, this number seems suspect, because no one ever mentioned houses being destroyed or torn

⁵ La Guardia, the town and its people, were the Margariteños idea of perfect simpletons. They were the butt of innumerable jokes, usually referring to the community's lack of intelligence. However, as more outsiders have come to the island, including tourists, I noted more jokes being directed at the strangers. Perhaps *los guarderños* will suffer less ridicule in the future as islanders' humor turns outward.

down, and the figure was recorded as part of an attempt to get more land for building new houses.

By the time I had conducted an almost complete census⁶ of La Galera in 1992, there were 414 inhabitants living in La Galera. This is a rather fluid number however, as the population is made up of many fishermen, who tend to shift from household to household and town to town depending on the season.

Of the population surveyed, 48% were female, and 52% male. As in most of Isla Margarita and the rest of the nation, the population balloons in the youngest to middle age group. There were very few residents over the age of 60 years.

La Galera was seen as predominantly a fishing village by those not living there; only 48% of those employed outside of the household (i.e., working for a wage of some sort), were involved in fishing as a main occupation. The rest were either employed directly in the tourism sector (17%) or in some other capacity (35%). There was little crossover between fishermen and those working in tourism. Therefore, La Galera was still a traditional sort of Margariteño community.

However, La Galera was also a community that seemed in 1992 to be poised on the edge of a takeoff into the world of tourism development. Great plans were in the works for transforming the beach front and building more hotels and restaurants along the beaches northern end. As will be shown, none of this had happened by November 1995, and with the situation as it now is in Venezuela in general, such change does not seem likely for a great while.

⁶ I was never able to survey four households in La Galera. The residents were either out of town, working, or did not want to be interviewed.

Still there was a nascent tourism in La Galera that had sprouted up since the end of the 1970s. There were four tourist hotels/residencies set along the beach, and various restaurants and smaller eateries. Over a hill to the north lay Playa Caribe, a beautiful beach that was attracting more and more tourists and the businesses that went with them.

Punta de Piedras

This pueblo of almost 8,000 persons has a rather split personality. There is still a strong economic tradition of fishing but it seems as if the town would like to move beyond that and into a different status. This it has done by being the only ferry terminal on the island, making Punta de Piedras the focal point of everyone who comes and goes to the island via boat. Until 1993, there were two ferry services, one state-owned and run, the other privately operated and called Conferry. The crowds generated can be enormous, and the town tries to exploit the crowd's brief presence as best they can. But because of past influences in the town, i.e., the politicians/*caciques*, no hotels for visitors or tourists have ever been built, no fancy restaurants, no amenities geared to the tourists at all. The only concession allowed has been the creation of small areas of market-like stalls where vendors can sell inexpensive souvenirs and local-style fast foods.

There is actually one very small hotel that has about eight rooms. This establishment is family-owned and is located directly across from the private ferry dock. Its clientele is composed mostly of truckers waiting to leave on an early morning ferry, and occasionally a place for local prostitutes to conduct business. There is no sign out front to even identify the purpose of the house; it resembles every other housefront on the street. One must be a local or know someone in town in order to know of the hotel's existence.

There had been two ferry lines until late 1992, one private and the other sponsored by the regional government. The government claimed it was operating the ferry line at a great financial loss, and closed it down. The small market located at the pier then also closed, and the taxi and bus (*por puesto*) lines were forced into direct competition with the businesses located by the private ferry line. This obviously hurt the inhabitants of Punta de Piedras. In 1996 I was informed that the private ferry company has planned building and entire new dock to be accompanied by hotels, restaurants, parks and possible accommodations for large cruise ships. If this is so, it will change the face of the pueblo once and for all.

But in 1992 Punta de Piedras was a town on the margins of tourism and the freeport. By being a port it could clandestinely enjoy a gleaning of all of what the trucks from the mainland brought to the island, and there were also many townspeople who actually became involved in the economy of transportation either as truck drivers or working for the ferry company. Others worked at transporting the people who arrived to their main destination, Porlamar. A good many residents are also variously employed at La Fundación La Salle Biological Research Station and its attached secondary school and university. But Punta de Piedras was and still is just a stopover, a place where visitors come only to leave.

The so-called satellite communities around Punta de Piedras, such as Las Mercedes, really a barrio of the town, Las Casitas, El Guamache, Las Hernandez, and Las Marvaes are very small, perhaps with their own chapel and school, more often not. The inhabitants work not in tourism but in the sardine factory located outside of Punta de Piedras, or in the gasoline refinery and international port of El Guamache. Some may work in Porlamar, mostly the women, and they can be seen early every morning walking the narrow

island roads out to the main highway to catch a small bus, called *por puestos*, for Porlamar.

The defining character of these small settlements is their marginal quality when compared to the satellite areas around Porlamar. Employment opportunities draw the people during the daytime, but the rest of their lives are spent away from contact with the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the eastern coast of Isla Margarita. Still, one must question the perceived degree of marginalisation of these communities. No, they do not have assured access to regular services such as running water, sewage, etc. Yet the cultural impacts of the freeport and its linked tourism are almost as strong and immediate in Punta de Piedras as in Villa Rosa. The physical distance of Porlamar is negligible with the advent of the numerous *por puestos*, and radio, television and an active press bring the city into the homes every day. This point will be returned to later in Part Two where the impacts of the changed economy are explored in detail.

CHAPTER 3

MARGARITA BEFORE: THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD TO THE MID-1950S

Venezuela is not noted as having the complex pre-columbian civilizations of Mexico or Peru, and was instead populated mainly by nomadic or hunter-gatherer tribes. Because the Spaniards found little in the way of material wealth to attract and hold them, they mined Venezuela instead for its human resources, raiding and enslaving thousands of Indians.

An exception to the harsh treatment the Spanish gave to other Indian groups in the New World were the inhabitants of Isla Margarita, the Guayquerí Indians, whose ascendants on the island of Cubagua and Isla Margarita date back at least as far as 4,000 years BP (Sanoja 1991; Gómez, et al. 1991). Seen as distinct from the more numerous Caribbean tribes of Awaraks and Caribs, the Guayqueries were primarily a fishing and horticultural people who lived in semi-permanent villages, primarily along the island's coast. According to McCorkle (1965) the Guayqueries were:

collectors of shell-fish, and hunters of sea turtles, deer, and rabbits, but [they] also practiced some horticulture. They cultivated maize and yuca, and had stone *metates* for grinding maize. They did not practice irrigation but did scoop out basins (called *pozos*) to hold rainwater through the dry seasons.

The Guayqueries also must have been proficient navigators, as the archaeological record points towards contacts with the peoples of Trinidad and the eastern mainland of Venezuela. Some these contacts were amiable, but others were not, and according to what historical record exists, the

Guayqueries were often the victims of warring raids by tribes of Carib Indians. Yet this variety of outside contacts is assumed by McCorkle to be one of the major reasons that the Spaniards treated the Guayqueries differently: they were Indians who were accustomed to receiving outsiders and thus knew how to play the role of host to different types of guests. McCorkle says further (1965:18) ²:

[The Guayqueries] lacked customs that would clash with Spanish ideology or offend against Catholic doctrine. And they had already a good deal of experience in dealing with foreign peoples, both enemy raiders and friendly neighbors. This unelaborate yet cosmopolitan configuration of their culture may have especially fitted the native of Margarita for survival in a world that was to be dominated by Europeans

Cubagua: The Colony of Pearls and Perils

The Guayquerí name for Isla Margarita was "Paraguachoa" meaning "many fish," but the European discovery of Isla Margarita is still somewhat unclear. Subero (1984:21) claims that Columbus passed the island in 1498 on his third voyage to the New World, and named it Isla Margarita (Greek for "pearl"). María states that Columbus actually landed on Cubagua during the same voyage, and named her "Isla de las Perlas," (Island of Pearls) (1986 :17). During his stopover, Columbus acquired many pearls, the largest supposedly being the size of a "pigeon's egg," (Maria 1986 :17). It was the pearls that brought explorers and adventures such as Alonso de Ojeda in 1499 , Americo Vespucci, and Pedro Alonso Niño. A small colony was established in 1509 with the sole intent of exploiting the rich pearl beds. Little is mentioned in surviving records of the Spaniards' attempt at winning souls for the Church. Any religious instruction of indigenous peoples seems to have come always as an begrudging afterthought only to silence the Church. At this time the

riches of Mexico and Peru were yet to be discovered and the pearls of Cubagua were the great attraction to the Spanish crown.

There came about a working relationship between the Guayqueries and the Spaniards: the Indians dove for pearls to trade for European goods, and the Spaniards helped protect the Indians from raids by other tribes. According to McCorkle (1965:19), this happy symbiosis had the result of granting the Guayqueries the status of free laborers. When the easily accessible pearl beds became depleted, the Indians were reluctant to dive in the deeper waters. Given their free status, the Spaniards technically could not force them to work, and so had to look elsewhere for labor.

Not all Guayqueries escaped the slaving designs of the Spaniards. According to Narvaez, a certain small number of Indians of the Macanao Peninsula were captured and sold off in either Cubagua, or sent to Puerto Rico or Santo Domingo. A few were even sold off to other Guayqueri Indians in the eastern part of Isla Margarita, but were later freed by the same, and sent secretly back to Macanao (Narvaez 1986:13). In fact, of the unknown number of slaves to escape from Cubagua, many ended up in Macanao, seeking refuge among the peninsular Indians.

At first the Spanish turned to the Bahamas for the enslavement of Lucayo Indians, who were also used in mining operations. Yet this labor supply was literally short-lived: the life of pearl-diving slaves was far from easy. Muilenburg (1991:36) describes pearling on Cubagua.

The average pearl bed lay in 40 feet of water, the deep ones in 70 feet. To reach the bottom quickly, the diver took a ballast stone from the bilge of the pearling boat. As its weight carried him down, he held his nostrils and mouth shut and blew, increasing inner pressure against his eardrums via the eustachian tubes, to equalize the increasing pressure of the depths. Once on the bottom he discarded the rock and swam about collecting oysters,

stuffing them into a net bag around his neck. When his breath was gone, he tugged the connectig line and was hauled back up by the crew in the boat. After catching his breath and gripping a new stone, he was down again.

Not only was such rigorous work tolling on the slaves, but dangers from sharks and maltreatment from their owners made sure that their lives were short. But by 1508 the Bahamas was depopulated by slavers, despite the protests from Dominican missionaries, most notably Bartolomé de Las Casas. The voracious need for slaves for Spanish pearling had to be satisfied.

Yet the settlement of Nueva Cadiz grew, both in size and reputation. It became a popular stopping off point for many Spanish vessels who would trade not only in pearls but also "parrots, wildcats, monkeys, salt, turtle shells, dyewood, and slaves," (Muilenburg 1991:37). Muilenburg (1991:37) also notes that the little settlement by 1520 had come to resemble a "wild west mining camp."

Drinking, gambling, murder and adultery kept the community in turmoil. The few Spanish women were hot in demand; even judges and governors were involved in scandalous triangles.

The continuing labor shortage lead to increasing Spanish slaving raids on the Venezuelan mainland. While the Dominican and Franciscan missions had been set up in the coastal cities of Cumaná and Santa Fé, their proselytizing presence did little to impede the slaving raids on mainland Indians. Muilenburg states, "By 1519-1520 there was steady traffic between the northern Caribbean and the Pearl Coast in slaves and pearls. An average of two to three armadas came every month, each bringing back some 50 slaves," (1991:37). Such activity inevitably ended in numerous bloody conflicts between coast Indians and Spanish.

Trying to bring order to both the coast and the licentious colony of pearlers, the Spanish crown sent Antonio Flores, who, according to Jimenez (1986:164) stands out for his cruelty to the Indians of Venezuela. Beatings, dragging the victims through settlements, false imprisonment and hanging of the Guayqueri culminated in a coastal rebellion in 1520 of the Indians against the Spaniards, primarily in the area around Cumaná. Numerous Spaniards were killed, along with two missionaries, with the remainder of the Franciscans being returned to Santo Domingo. Guayqueri and other coastal tribes had poisoned the water sources on Isla Margarita, forcing the Spanish to the coast for water, and into the arms of the angry coastal tribes. Faced with such a quandary, the approximately 300 Spanish of Cubagua made the decision to abandon the island. By the following year, the Spanish crown ordered that Cubagua be repopulated and rebuilt. By 1523 the settlement on Cubagua had its own mayor (*alcalde*), notaries, and other royal officials and was organized into the town of Nueva Cádiz.

This was not the end of the question of slaving on the coast. Both slaving expeditions approved by the Spanish Crown and those operating clandestinely continued, provoking numerous rebellions by the indigenous population around Cuamaná. These uprising were consistently responded to by punitive missions by the Spanish. Jimenez (1986:170) claims though that between 1520 and 1525 the area was considered to be "pacified" and the economy become defined by pearling and coastal slaving. Some of the pacified slaves from the coast were taken to Cubagua to work in the pearl fisheries. The rest were sold off in the island of Hispaniola.

As Cubagua is even more arid than parts of Margarita, inhabiting the island at any time was no easy task. There was no water, no firewood, no building materials. The Spaniards had to travel to the mainland, to Cumaná,

to obtain water from the Río Manzanares. From Isla Margarita came firewood, and from the stark Peninsula de Araya were brought the stones to build houses, public buildings and religious sanctuaries. But because Isla Margarita was the closest region to supply the necessities for Nueva Cádiz, and because the Indians were usually on good terms with the Spanish, it became more of a focal point for possible future settlement.

In the mid-1530s, Marcelo Villalobos was assigned the island of Margarita and directed to send livestock and colonizers to settle the island. In searching for propitious areas in which to begin a colony, the colonizers chose the eastern area of Isla Margarita, at the base of the mountains, now known as El Valle del Espíritu Santo, then known as Pueblo Viejo (Maria 1986:20). This region was inland from the coast a some ten kilometers, cooler and more lush than other areas, and most importantly, it had water. Another settlement was founded closer to the coast, Pueblo del Mar or sometimes Puerto del Pueblo de la Mar, later shortened to Porlamar.

In 1541 natural disaster struck the colony of Nueva Cádiz. An earthquake and subsequent tidal wave destroyed most of the city, leaving its inhabitants to flee to Isla Margarita. What was left of the city was burned and demolished by French pirates in 1543. So ended the glory of Cubagua - never to be repopulated. As the story of Isla Cubagua fades out, then begins the story of its sister island, Margarita.

The Colonial Period on Isla Margarita

By the time the Spanish settlers had decided to cast their lot with Isla Margarita instead of Cubagua, events on other parts of the New World had diminished the economic importance of these Caribbean islands. Cortez was

in Mexico, Pizarro in Peru, and the quantity of pearls around Cubagua and Margarita had diminished drastically.

Being still on good terms with the native Indians of the island, the Guayqueries, the Spanish had little problems in founding settlements on Isla Margarita. In fact, the Guayqueries had acquired the status of free vassals of the king of Spain. From McCorkle (1965: 23) one reads:

a) Philip II at El Pardo, December, 1578

"We order that where there may be pearling settlements, the Indians not be impeded, but they may fish, like all the rest of our vassals freely, and according to their will, paying the (royal) fifth and rights, and disposing of them the same (same) way as the Spaniards."

b) Philip II, at Barcelona, 2 June, 1585. Confirmed by Philip III, 1610.

"We order, that the fishing of pearls be performed with Negroes, and not be permitted to be done with Indians. And we order, that if some should be forced, and against their will, he who has so forced them incurs, and violently, the punishment of death."

It was precisely the good relationship between the Guayqueries and the Spanish that caused Isla Margarita to be at the time one of the areas in Venezuela most involved in the slave trade from Africa (Pollak-Eltz 1972:14). According to estimates from the Bishop of Caracas in 1650, in all of Isla Margarita there were 1,500 African slaves and 120 free mulattos. The capital city in 1620 was La Asunción, which had but 250 Spanish inhabitants. It appears that Isla Margarita followed a pattern common to many of the other Caribbean islands of having a majority of slaves and a very small ruling class of whites. Due the practice of miscegenation and set laws that made it easier for African slaves to gain their liberty, the population on Isla Margarita was quite varied, being composed of Europeans, Indians, Africans, and everything in between. However, it is very important to note that what the Spanish

Crown decreed and what was actually practice in the colonies were too often very different things. So, for example was the case of the Royal Provision of August 2, 1530, that abolished slavery in the Americas. However, so entrenched were the elites of Cubagua in the practice of slaving, that they opposed rabidly any change in the status quo. The elites simply ignored the royal order and continued to grant slaving licenses. By 1533 the Crown realized that it had no power to enforce its decree, and so succumbing to pressure from the colonies, reestablished the "Just War" against the indigenous population.

So was the case on Isla Margarita with regard to the Guayqueri. While they may not have been enslaved, the Indians were treated by law as second-class citizens, and in times of economic necessity, their lands were seized and they were pressured into working for the Spanish elite.

Towns of note on the island in the 1600s were the seaport of Pampatar, Tacarigua, Pedro Gonzales, Parguachí, and San Juan. There were also shifting pearl fishing camps on the Peninsula of Macanao. However, the population was concerned mostly with fishing, small scale agriculture and livestock raising. Primary agricultural produce consisted of corn, yuca, bananas, coconuts, dates, mangoes, and sugar cane. One early export was tobacco: in 1612, Isla Margarita exported 15,803 pounds of tobacco, and the following year increased the yield to 17,500 pounds (Subero 1984:21). No other sources mention continued export of this crop, so it is unknown just how this crop fared. However, tobacco is still grown on a small-scale and consumed locally, mostly in the form of handrolled cigars favored by the older Margariteña women.

According to McCorkle, pearling operations were suspended some time after 1650, leading to the downfall of Porlamar (1965: 27). In general, the

island and the surrounding region became neglected and poor, so that by the early 1700s, Margarita and Cumaná were left off shipping routes, and what was left over at the larger port of La Guaira (near Caracas) served as supplies for Margarita. Alexander (1958:137) notes that, "La Asunción was nearly a ghost town with most of its Spanish population scattered in the country where they made a meager living on small farms and stock ranches. The Guayqueri were living under much the same conditions." The economic neglect only facilitated what was already an entrenched economic practice, embarking Margariteños on a long career of smuggling, a profession which endured heartily until the beginning of the *zona franca* in 1968, and in some ways, endures in the 1990s. Again, quoting McCorkle (1965:28):

Some of the chief island products were sugar cane and raw sugar; cotton, coarse cloth, thread, and fine stockings; hammocks; enough cacao, coffee and indigo for home use; melons, watermelons and squashes for use and export; goats, sheep, cattle, mares, mules and donkeys; wool, cheese, leather and shoes; and salt. The (Guayquerí) Indians, using *mandingas* and *chincorros* (which are seine nets of probably Mediterranean origin as far as this region is concerned), caught many fish, some of which were sold in La Guaira, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Trinidad.

At this time people also engaged in weaving cloth, hammock-making, shoe-making, and pottery, some of which were exported to the mainland and neighboring islands. All of these craft traditions still endure, if on a lesser scale, on Isla Margarita in 1992.

One Hundred Years or So of Solitude: Isla Margarita, 1850-1960

After the wars for independence from Spain had been won, Venezuela was still far from being a peaceful country. The wars had ravaged the countryside, upsetting agriculture, uprooting people, and leaving many dead.

There was a vacuum in leadership, and a general refusal by those in the interior regions of the country to easily accept being ruled by the Caracas elite. Because of this jumbled political situation, the distinct areas of the country often developed as they saw fit, or rather, as circumstances would allow (Lombardi 1982).

The case of Isla Margarita was no different. The wars too had taken their toll on the island, both in lives and material goods. Isla Margarita was left still impoverished, and few alternatives existed to improve its economic situation. So people did what most would do in such a predicament: they got by as best they could. While the rest of Venezuela was primarily involved in cacao production and cattle-raising, and in the 1920s turning to petroleum as a "cash crop," Margariteños lived much as they had before the wars, engaging in artisanal fishing, small scale agriculture, crafts and smuggling.

The best definition for Margariteño society before the free port is that of a peasant economy and culture. Peasants, according to Wolf (1966) are agricultural producers faced with the problem of both their own survival (providing the caloric minimum) and the production of a replacement fund (equipment, means of production, for both consumption and production), and surplus for a ceremonial fund (a fund that allows people to elaborate on social relations), and funds of rent (paid in labor, produce or money). Labor is performed by the household, which the peasant must maintain as an economic unit and a home. "The perennial problem of the peasantry thus consists in balancing the demands of the external world against the peasants' need to provision their households." The first strategy a peasant may use in fulfilling these demands is to increase production, the second is the curtailment of consumption.

Furthermore, Wolf (1966:11) states, "It is only when a cultivator is integrated into a society with a state - that is when the cultivator becomes subject to the demands and sanctions of power-holders outside his social stratum - that we can appropriately speak of peasantry."

Wolf (1966:4) goes on to say, "peasants, however, are rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of ruler that uses the surpluses both to underwrite its own standard of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn."

The problem faced in applying this definition of peasant to the population of Margarita is somewhat complex. There were a large number of Margariteños who were not cultivators of any sort, in fact, they were either fishermen or smugglers. Those who did cultivate crops or raise livestock such as goats owned their own land, and others lived in the cities of Porlamar and La Asunción, being petty mercantilists and service-providers. Yet, these different types of occupations can still be seen as "peasant" if one views them as Gamst does (1974:6):

Peasants may be viewed as one of three kinds of *folk*, illiterate and nearly powerless commoners originating with and found within the social organization of the civilized state. The other two are *townsmen*, living in preindustrial urban centers, and *pastoralists*, those herders who are controlled to some extent by a civilized state. The state's formal political institutions, controlled by an elite, are the means of effective subordination of commoners .

Thus, Margariteños were part of and subject to a very centralized state organization that emanated from Caracas, yet because of their physical distance from this central government, were left literally at the margins of its power. If we look at Isla Margarita as peasant society within a state system,

the impacts of state actions on the Margariteño collectivity can be understood. Isla Margarita has always been, since colonial days, subject to whims of outsiders clothed in the trappings of a state.

Following Gamst (1974: 6), Isla Margarita occupied the outer territorial zone where, "little, nominal, or no state authority lies." For much of the hundred years or so of solitude that idled over the island, the country was dominated either by dictatorships or instable democratic governments. Whatever the form of federal government, the impact on Isla Margarita was much the same, benign neglect. It was only after the fall of the last Venezuelan dictator, Marcos Pérez Jimenez, in 1958, that Isla Margarita began to fall more under the influence of the powers emanating from the capital of Caracas.

Local control of Margariteños was maintained by town or village *caciques* who by dint of fate or cunning were linked to power centers in the Venezuelan capital. Margariteño *pueblos* approached being closed corporate societies in that each had their own system of social stratification and distinct form of economy. Yet because the island was small, each *pueblo* also had kinship and economic links to other *pueblos* on the island. Furthermore, the majority of island communities appeared to be quite open due to out-migration, long-distance fishing expeditions to other Caribbean islands and the delta region of the Orinoco river, and the great amount of smuggling activities. The impression one gets of Margarita during this era is of a people who are very much cognizant of their national status, proud of their role in obtaining its independence, but also marginal to the state to the point of being outlaws and rebels.

It is also difficult to obtain an objective picture of the island before the implementation of the freeport regime. All accounts that I have read, even

those supposedly "scientific," have tended to romanticize the life of islanders previous to 1971. The islanders are seen as pure and untainted, the women as hardworking and dedicated unswervingly to their men and children, the water pure, the air clean. The population is noted as always being happy, given to fiestas at the drop of a hat, and all are well-fed and healthy. Life is never that good, no matter where one is. So where are the accounts of the droughts that occurred? Of times of hunger? If the freeport was brought into being due to the agreed upon economic depression so widespread on the island, then why are there no accounts of this? Even Alexander, a geographer from the United States is drawn to the mythology of the "Merry Margariteño," when he writes (1958:143):

The Margariteño is highly regarded as an employee; he is a hard worker, quick to learn and with a sense of responsibility. He also has a reputation for independence, honesty, thrift, and for minding his own business.

This myth has been used often in creating the image of Margarita that is sold to tourists, both Venezuelan and international in origin. Exploration of this myth is grist for future study; now it is necessary to look at the next historical stage in the development of the modern Isla Margarita, the implementation of the regime of the freeport and its concomitant forms of tourism.

CHAPTER 4 THE TRANSFORMATION OF MARGARITA

Introduction

We are before two alternatives: we either protect what we are as a *pueblo*, which should be the obvious choice, or we cowardly hand ourselves over into the hands of the most recent Phoenicians, those who are conquering us in order to convert us into a new colony that will satisfy their desires of insatiable exploitation. By creating a consciousness in the people, it would be an affront to our dignity, the sign erected in the airport of Porlamar, where without respect, a credit card company announces, "Fortunate is the man who conquers an island with his signature." When this island will be conquered by a check, it will never more be Isla de Margarita. Or another advertisement, that appeared in a magazine, "In Margarita, everything is for sale." That is, here they sell as much as it is important to sell to the visitor, and more: the land is for sale, the houses, the fisherman's boat, his net, his castnet, the hen, the jeweler's crystal, the *cogollo* of the date farmer, the clay of the potter, the thread of the weaver, the *pilón*, the pen of the writer, the grandmother's litter, faith, the art of the creator, the work of the thinker, honor, dignity, decorum, history, time, the house of Arismendi, that of Gómez, the castle of San Carlos, that of Santa Rosa, the lights, the ocean, the canals of La Restinga, the flight of the seagulls, the blood that colors the Lagoon of the Martyrs. That is to say, we are a people that already knows the day of the Apocalypse, and we sell as much as we have, in order to hand it over to the unstoppable enjoyment of pleasure in its last moments. [To do] that would be the absolute negation of the history of the Margarita of which we are honored and proud.

Jesús Manuel Subero, 1984, Historia Popular de Margarita.

Unbelievably to me, the sign that says you can conquer the island with just your signature is still there on the road out of the Santiago Mariño

International Airport in Isla Margarita. The only difference is that now it refers to the signature one uses with their credit card. But I would beg to differ with Subero, the island's revered and officially proclaimed historian. In 1994 at least, one still could not buy just anything on the island, although it seemed sometimes that one could. Margariteños had somehow managed to preserve their private lives from the onslaught of commercialism and tourism. This preservation may be accidental and temporary, the simple result of marginalization of the local population rather than a concerted effort of cultural resistance, but it is reinforced everyday by the native Margariteño. The result has been to create two Isla Margaritas, one existing alongside of the other, interacting regularly and by necessity in some spheres, and completely ignoring each other in others.

In the pages that follow, I will recount how the "Phoenecians" arrived on Isla Margarita, and what the result of that arrival has been. The creation of a duty-free port has long been a goal of many people associated with the island, and finally in the mid-1970s it became a reality. With some modification it continues today, although in recent years the viability of imported commercialism has been threatened by the drop in the price of Venezuelan oil in the world market, the political upheavals besetting the country, and the general depressed state of the world economy. Because of these problems, in 1992 and through 1994, it was popular to declare the free port as dying, if not already dead. In its place, international mass tourism was to become the economic saviour for the island. But the same problems eat away at that market as they do at the free port. If there is no money to spend on French perfume and Chivas Regal scotch whiskey, let alone buy a kilo of grade two beef, how can one expect Venezuelans to have the money to stay in luxury hotels? If there is no money to extend water services and upgrade

electrical service, and to in general improve the standard of living of the island's populace, why would a European or Canadian (never mind the more demanding US citizen) bother to visit a vacation spot that is only a crude imitation of Jamaica, or the Cayman Islands? The outlook for Isla Margarita is not promising, but this will be explored further in the final conclusion.

I have in the following section treated in many cases the free port as synonymous with tourism. The free port stores do not exist without a good many shoppers, hence they exist by the grace of the numbers of tourists that come to the island. This has been the situation since the beginning of the free port in 1975. However, with a greater emphasis put on international tourism, free port entrepreneurs are beginning to worriedly question what role, if any they will continue to play as the tourism industry courts less the Venezuelan tourist and flirts more with those who come from abroad.

The History of the Free Port in Isla Margarita

A free port is defined as a specifically designated area where goods of origin foreign to the country may be imported and resold without being subject to the countries normal restrictions of importation and taxes. This is the entity now in place in Isla Margarita, and how it came into existence and what the effects have been of such a commercial regime are the subjects of this chapter.

Since the early 1800s, Isla Margarita has been seen as a good site for a commercial port. In 1827, after the War of Independence, Simón Bolívar declared the port town of Pampatar to be a port for international commercial exchange. On August 6, 1829, Bolívar furthered his declaration, naming Isla Margarita a "free port," citing the poor socioeconomic conditions of the island that necessitated such action. These were 1) the sterility of the land, 2) the

destruction and havoc left by the battles of the war, and 3) the decline in population on the island due to high rates of out-migration. But little came of the decree, if fact, it existed in name only.

Again, in 1864, the Constitutional Assembly declared both Juan Griego and Pampatar as *zona francas*, that is, specific ports that were free of existing tariff regulations. But this declaration did not have any effect either, and it was officially extinguished by 1905 when a 10% value-added tax was imposed on all goods imported, exported and stored not only on the island but throughout Venezuela.

In 1943 there was more discussion of making the island or some of its ports into tax and tariff-free zones. Still, it was not until 1965 when the discussion grew truly serious. The group known as FEDECAMARAS (Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción) developed their own justification for making Isla Margarita a free zone for importing and exporting goods. They claimed that such a regime would 1) act as a stimulus for attracting visitors, not only for tourism but for reasons of commerce; 2) be a source of investment funds for islanders (to come from the stores, hotels, restaurants, etc.); 3) would help to create industry in Isla Margarita, stemming the outward flow of money from the island; and 4) it would lower the cost of living for the island's inhabitants and for the tourists to come.

According to Beauford (1977:35), the island was extremely impoverished before implementing the free port, with:

...the majority of the population living from rudimentary fishing activity, or some agriculture, with others employed in scarce wage labor or in the public sector, and a good amount of the others dedicated to the smuggling of merchandise, cigarettes,

and liquor. And those not involved with these activities emigrated to other regions of the country in search of work.

Because of the perceived and real impoverishment of the island, arguments for the creation of a free port to save the economy were seductive. Tourism was seen as a great solution to alleviate the poverty of Isla Margarita: it was "gentle" development, and the island was a natural tourist attraction, with its dry and sunny climate, its extensive coastline, and its quaint fishing villages. People would come not only to visit the island for its beauty, but to shop in the newly opened stores full of imported luxury goods. The money generated from the stores, hotels and restaurants, it was postulated, would flow back into the local economy, raising the quality of life and in general benefitting all concerned. Not only would the profits help the island, but at the national level, the free port would help stem the flow of Venezuelan tourist money out of the country to Curacao and Trinidad. The opening of the free port would also, it was hoped, put an end to the lucrative and extant practice of smuggling that until the beginnings of the 1970s was such an important source of income for islanders.

The island's problem of a lack of natural resources to exploit and turn into exports would also be solved by bringing in raw materials and having them processed on the island to then be sold there and elsewhere. However, what these industries would be was never made clear, and the only evidence I ever found of anything approaching this ideal was the Pepsi Cola bottling factory on the outskirts of Porlamar (the sardine canning factory outside of Punta de Piedras does not fit in this scheme). This idea of building small industrial parks was actually given up by the 1980s, and in its place tourism, both national and international, was to be promoted.

In 1966 Venezuelan president Raúl Leoni signed into law the act to create zona francas in Isla Margarita. The zona franca was to be contained physically in some port areas. But not surprisingly, enforcement of containment procedures was slack, and all of the island became one big tariff-free zone. The national government was urged by the island's elites to firm up the regulations.

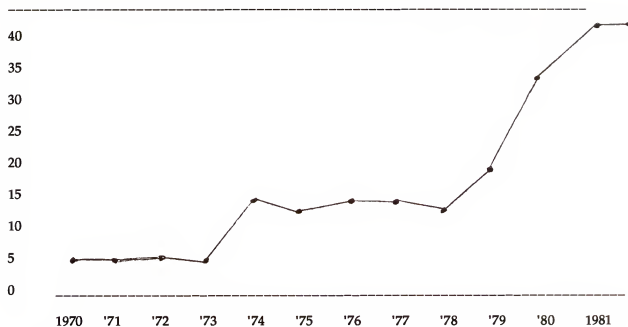
By 1971, Porlamar, Pampatar and Punta de Piedras were declared tariff-free zones, or zona francas. Still, this was in word only, and the "leakage" of duty-free goods occurred with great frequency. In 1974, during the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez, Decree #511 was signed into law. This established a Regimen of Free Port for Isla Margarita, meaning that all goods coming from outside Venezuela could enter the island tax and tariff free, with no restriction on amounts, as long as they conformed to existing laws. Therefore, in April, 1975, the free port as it is mostly known today, came into existence in Isla Margarita.

The impacts of the introduction of the new economy of a free port were dramatically rapid, particularly in the city of Porlamar. While this city was at the time the commercial center, the regime of free port intensified Polamar's role as the heart of the island's business world. The city's population doubled from 1971 to 1990, not including the growth in the outskirts of Porlamar proper, in areas such as Villa Rosa, San Antonio, Valle Verde, and Pampatar. But as will be seen in Part Two, there was little to no planning for what would happen once the free port structure was introduced. No one accounted for how the island would support a massive influx of visitors or immigrants, and consequently the infrastructural supports were not in place and have yet to catch up with the dizzying growth that has beset Isla Margarita.

The growth continued crazily and then intensified incredibly towards the end of the 1970's. It must be emphasized that no matter how inconsequential the island may appear in a global perspective, the global and national economy have had a strong hand in shaping the everyday lives of the Margariteños. The years after 1975 were ones of a dizzying economic boom for Venezuela: with the United States being faced with an oil embargo by the Middle Eastern oil producing countries, the United States turned to the Western Hemisphere to fill its petroleum scarcity. The price of Venezuelan oil shot sky high, and it seemed to everyone in the country that heaven had settled at last in a deserving and patient Venezuela.

In 1970, the US dollar price per barrel of Venezuelan oil was \$2.00, and in 1973, \$3.50 per barrel. The following figure shows graphically just how sensational this rise in prices was.

Figure 4.1 Value of Petroleum Exports for Venezuela, 1970 - 1981



After Dávila, 1993:160, from Informe Económico del Banco Central, 1981.

With such a rich national economy, it was not long before the flows of immigrants from the poorer of Venezuela's neighboring countries began. Many of these immigrants were drawn to Isla Margarita, where there was the promise of employment in commerce or construction. Again, Table 4.1 serves to underline just how the population size increased in Isla Margarita in the years after the free port was instituted, relative to the nation overall.

Table 4.1 Rate of Population Growth, Venezuela and Nueva Esparta (in %) 1950 - 1990

Years	Venezuela		Nueva Esparta	
	Relative Growth	Geometric	Relative Growth	Geometric
1950-61	49.4	4.0	18.9	1.51
1961-71	42.5	3.4	32.8	2.88
1971-81	35.4	3.1	65.9	5.30
1981-90	24.7	2.5	33.7	3.30

From FEDECAMARAS, 1991:33

Employment and the Free Port

The main goal of creating the free port and encouraging tourism was twofold, to promote higher rates of employment for Margariteños, and to offer new sources of employment. Has this happened? To answer the question, I will present data from secondary sources and then the results of the survey I conducted of the employees working in the stores of the free port.

To determine if Margariteños have been the beneficiary of this new economic regime, one must first ask who is now living on the island. If migration flows were so great to the island in the 1970s and early 1980s, what percentage of the island's population was born somewhere other than Isla Maragarita? According to the Censo 90 en Nueva Esparta, in 1990, only 72% of the population living on the island was actually born there. The remainder came from either other Venezuelan states (24%) or from outside the country (4%). However, I have reservations about the number of those born outside the country. If only four percent were born outside of the country, their presence on the island is exceptionally strong, from politics to commerce. I would imagine there to be an undercount due to the sensitive nature of the question (if in the country illegally, a person usually is reluctant to speak with any government representative). Furthermore, an official at the island's office

of OCEI admitted that the entire census was probably in error plus/minus eight percent.

Out-of-the-country immigrants are mostly represented by people from other Latin America (57%), with the greatest numbers coming from Colombia (31%). Immigrants from Asia make up thirteen percent of the island's residents, and 23% come from Europe. There were nine percent from Spain, seven percent from Italy, and three percent from Portugal. Table 4.2 shows how immigration to Nueva Esparta has progressed since 1950.

Table 4.2 Distribution of the Population of Nueva Esparta, According to Place of Birth, 1950 - 1990

Place of Birth	Census Years									
	1990	%	1981	%	1971	%	1961	%	1950	%
Total	263748	100.0	197198	100.0	118830	100.0	89492	100.0	75899	100.0
In Venezuela	253456	96.1	188949	95.8	117961	99.3	88708	99.1	75471	99.4
On Island	189084	71.7	147728	74.9	110243	92.8	83159	92.9	72259	95.2
Other States	64372	24.4	41221	20.9	7718	6.5	5549	6.2	3212	4.2
Out of Country	10292	3.9	8249	4.2	869	0.7	784	0.9	428	0.6

From El Censo 90 en Nueva Esparta 1990:29

As I will show in the results from my survey, the majority of shop owners are not Margariteños but are from off-island locations, first from out of the country, followed by those from other areas in Venezuela, primarily from Caracas.

Table 4.3 Work Force Composition, Isla Magarita, 1961 - 1981

Year	Total Pop.	Population Older than 15 Years	Employed	Unemployed*	Number Inactive
1961	89,492	48,807 (55%)	19,887 (41%)	2,976 (13%)	25,732 (53%)
1971	118,830	66,816 (56%)	26,272 (39%)	2,292 (8%)	38,252 (57%)
1981	197,198	118,948 (60%)	56,407 (47%)	5,662 (9%)	56,979 (50%)

* Percentage of Unemployed of Total Number Employed Plus Unemployed
From Dávila, 1993:124

Has the free port generated more employment overall, and of those who are eligible to work, what percentage is actually employed? Yes, overall, the number of positions has increased, but taking into account the growth in population, little real gain has been made. Table 4.3 shows how the island's

employment levels have stayed relatively the same since the free port regime was implemented.

How were the jobs that were created by the free port distributed? As will be seen in Chapter Eight, the types of work that were traditionally performed on Isla Margarita declined in importance over the years since 1971, except perhaps for fishing. In 1961, those employed in primary sector activities, which includes fishing, livestock raising, and hunting, totaled 29% of the island's economically active population. In the same year, only six percent of the population was employed in construction. Forty-one percent of the work force was working in the tertiary sector, that is, commerce, transport, and public and private services.

By 1981 the picture was decidedly different. Those working in fishing, hunting and livestock only made up seven percent of the actively employed sector. Construction has now captured 10 % of the working population, but an absolute increase of 75%. The tertiary sector proves to be the area of greatest growth, now in 1981 comprising a full 68 % of the total eligible work force.

It should be noted that the decline in the absolute number of participants in fishing as an occupation seems to be more decided by the profitability in this sector than direct competition from job offerings in the free port (Cardenas and Mendoza 1991). Furthermore, the percentages include those Margariteños involved in livestock production, an area of production that has distinctly lost importance since 1971.

So the free port did act as a great stimulus for generating jobs in the service sector, as would be predicted. But it does not appear to have solved any problems of unemployment or underemployment. Furthermore, it should be asked if whether the quality of jobs is really any better than what

was available before the new economy was set up. Previously, one owned one's labor, and one's "profits" directly benefitted one's family. Now, the pattern is pure wage labor, with set hours and dress codes. The work tends to now be more repetitive, and with less challenges than before. While workers have a good set of protections in place both through local contracts with the free port trade association and guaranteed by the Venezuelan constitution, there is now the problem of a severe lack of capital to pay workers their benefits such as sick or maternity leave.

Having determined the increase in local population and the heavy immigrant flow to the island, plus seeing that most jobs were created in the service sector, it is necessary to determine *who* is actually working in the free port service businesses. Monk and Alexander (1986:409) decided that it was not native Margariteños that were filling these positions that were, for the most part, in Porlamar. They state their argument as follows:

Clearly the free port has radically changed the economy of Margarita as thousands of people arrive for shopping and holidays. Men from the rural communities have been able to take advantage of new employment in transportation and construction, although some of this employment relates to changes, for example, in the road network, which reflect governmental attention to improving services on the island, not only to changes associated with the free port...male unemployment is low...though there may be underemployment.

By comparison, women...have not found significant employment in the hotels and stores, and their craft and garden production has declined. Female unemployment is significantly higher than male unemployment.

My survey results show that this is both true and untrue. Native Margariteña women do work in the free port stores, and in the hotels and restaurants. But they are Margariteñas that live either in Porlamar or in one of the close bedroom communities. And they are employed in lower numbers than those who came from outside the island. Let me now present the significant results of my free port survey.

Summary Results of the Free Port Survey, Porlamar and Juan Griego

In the fall of 1992, I developed and conducted a short survey form that would allow me to interview a random sample of the employees in the free port retail businesses of Porlamar, and secondarily, Juan Griego. The survey is reproduced in the Appendix, along with a methodological explanation. The results of the survey point to the fact that the free port, while creating an increase in the absolute number of jobs, has not created jobs equally for all Margariteños. The retail businesses are dominated by employees who are not native Margariteños, and when they are, they are mostly from Porlamar or the city's immediate surroundings. The free port's benefits therefore seem centered in Porlamar and have not had a general impact. This is underscored by the fact that the majority of the stores owners are not Margariteños either, nor even Venezuelan-born residents in many cases.

Of the nine stores surveyed in Juan Griego, eight of the owners were of foreign birth, and only one was Venezuelan, but not of Isla Margarita. In all of the stores in Juan Griego, the owner was also the manager of the store. In Porlamar, 36 stores were surveyed. Of these, eight percent of the owners were Margariteños, 28% were Venezuelan, and the remainder, 42%, were originally from outside the country. Twenty-two percent either preferred not to answer, or the employee providing the information claimed to not know the answer. This was a sensitive question because for a long time, the "traditionalists" (as I came to call those Margariteños who called for a complete abandonment of the free port regime and its linked tourism) had been very vocal in railing against the "damn foreigners" who were taking over the island. In many instances, this was expressed vehemently and was particularly aimed against the Colombians and those of Middle Eastern descent.

Determining who held positions of management was another question. One of the charges against tourism is that it does not employ locals except in low-level and menial positions. Unfortunately, this charge seemed to bear out in the stores of Porlamar also. Where the manager's origin was determined, 33% were from other parts of Venezuela, 50% were of foreign birth, and only 25% were native Margariteño.

Wanting to see if there was a preference for "like to hire like," I broke down the results to see if there was a tendency for store owners to hire people more like themselves. Where the owner was from elsewhere in Venezuela, 60% of the managers were also. If the owner was of foreign birth, 73% of their managers were also. And in the case of the Margariteño shop owners, no foreigners were managers, 33% were Venezuelan, and 66 % were other Margariteños.

The total number of employees I interviewed was 92. They were overwhelmingly female (79%) and young (median age was about 23 to 24 years old). All of the employees interviewed in Juan Griego were female, and in Porlamar, 19 were male (24 %). The men had a tendency to have worked the longest average time in one store, an average of 3.4 years. The women in Porlamar had worked an average of 2.1 years, while the women of Juan Griego had worked less than one year in their current position. This shows a tendency for high job turnover in the stores, especially when one realizes that 64% of the Juan Griego women had been employed previously. predominately in other stores. The same held true for the employees in Porlamar, where 78% of the women had worked in other positions, 93% of whom had worked in other free port retail stores. Only one woman had worked in a business designated as tourist-oriented.

Where were the employees from? Were they immigrants to Isla Margarita of recent origin? Of those surveyed in Juan Griego, none claimed to be of foreign birth, 57% were Venezuelan, and 42% were from Isla Margarita. In Porlamar, the results are somewhat different. Forty-nine percent of the female employees were born elsewhere in Venezuela, while 12% were born outside of the country. Thirty-nine percent of the female workers were native Margariteñas.

From the above percentages, it can be concluded that the free port as a scheme to create employment for Margariteños has not fully succeeded. Not only do the stores favor hiring employees that are not native to the island, but those Margariteños that do work in the stores come from a very circumscribed area of the island. Of all the employees surveyed in Porlamar, 64% live either in Porlamar proper or in one of the city's bedroom communities. The remainder are spread out around the island, but in such low numbers that one must question how much the economic benefits of the free port have translated out of Porlamar. This concentration of employees and employment in the city also underscores arguments made in other chapters about the increasing marginalization of Margariteños who do not live close to the "center," but rather exist on the periphery.

The Rosca that is Tourism

In order to put a more human face on how tourism is received and perceived by the Margariteños themselves, I now include an interlude of a sort, taken from my field notes of August 1992. In I recount a brief interview with a Margariteño fisherman and his views on what tourism means to him.

At about 9:00 am, I took a por puesto out to the Hotel Concorde to try to track down some fishermen who have been involved in the conflict over the proposed cruiseship dock at El Morro. But once I arrived there I realized that the fishermen that fished the area lived in the sector called Bella Vista, close to where my apartment is. Flaggging down a cab, whose driver was an older Margariteño, who, of course, knew one of the older fisherme who fishes off El Morro. He took me to Bella Vista and sent me to a ranchería on the beach that belonged to Cirilio, a man of about 65-68 yrs of age.

Cirilio was seated in a typical metal framed, plastic weave chair, a small work bench to his one side, mending a fishing net. He had a large belly, was clean shaven, with gray, straight hair. The ranchería was a large concrete building, with storage areas for nets and motors in the rear, that opened onto the beach.

I introduced myself and explained briefly what I was up to. Cirilio didn't seem to mind talking to me, in fact, he opened right up, seemingly happy to have company while he worked.

I began by asking about the proposed dock at El Morro. Cirilio said that nothing should be done because any type of larger dock would disturb the fishing. Why? Because in front of the Morro there is a "bajo" (low reef) of rocks that runs from the Morro to in front of the downtown section of P'mar. Inside this shallow are the fish, and the construction of the dock would cut off the traditional path of the fishermen when they are "encallando," or netting for sardines, etc. Futhermore, the influx of cruiseships would reduce the number of fish attracted to the area.

The first and existing dock was built six years ago by Fucho Tovar, currently senator of Nueva Esparta and now running for governor. He is also the owner of Conferry and one of the primary owners of Hotel Margarita

Hilton here in Porlamar. The idea at that time was to have ferry boats from La Guaira and Carupano use the dock. Apparently this didn't work so well, and these boats are now in Puerto La Cruz and under the name of "Barcos Azules," and used in an unspecified business.

One or two years ago there was another company that wanted to run day cruises from Puerto La Cruz to Porlamar. The company's boat, the Vikinga, was of Panamenian registry. They swung a deal with the district of Mariño (where Porlamar is located) to be able to use El Morro dock for one year without paying any taxes or docking fees in order to gauge the feasibility of their business venture. The deal was thus: a person bought a ticket for the cruise at bs. 1000 (more or less, with the exchange rate then at approximately 40 bolívars/US dollar). This ticket included transportation from the ticket office to the dock, all food and drink (and one scotch whiskey here costs about bs. 200 in a bar, so as one can see, one can easily drink their fare away - and ride for free), transport to and from Porlamar, and then transport back to Puerto La Cruz. This went on for a year, and at the end of the "experiment" the company decided that it was not profitable, so they pulled up and left. The general consensus was they just used the situation to their benefit, made their money and then disappeared, laughing all the way to the bank. Both Cirilio and another fisherman who had joined us said that the business didn't benefit anyone in Margarita or Puerto La Cruz. For example, Cirilio said that the women couldn't even sell empanadas to the tourists because there was no demand - everything was paid for. The taxis couldn't make any money either - the company had their own transportation. Cirilio sees this as just another way that tourism doesn't serve the people, and even less, the fishermen of Margarita. "El turismo es para el gobierno, no para nosotros," (Tourism is for the government, not for us) he says. That is, he sees the

government as a group apart from the regular folk, even if, for example, Morel Rodriguez, the governor, is Margariteño. And this is a theme that comes up often, "them and us." "They" are those with lots of money, who own lots of things like hotels and large businesses and the government, they who have obtained thier wealth usually at the expense of "us," and most likely through corruption.

This way of marginalizing the people and keeping the goods to a select few is known as making a *rosca* here, and an example would be the Vikinga deal, or even the government with it's rampant corruption. The word literally translates as a circle, which is what it is, a circle of power.

For most of the first year I was on Isla Margarita, I tried to find some evidence of a plan for the growth of tourism on the island. Not necessarily a written plan, but I was searching for some sense that what was occurring had some direction it was following. There was always plenty of talk about tourism, how it needed to be better promoted, how it has grown as a generator of income and jobs, and what needed to be done to to improve the tourism projects already in place. But time after time, one Spanish word kept coming to mind when I examined the tourist developments offered up on the island: *chimbo*. Chimbo can many things, and be used in a variety of situations. But in this case, chimbo to me meant a tourism industry that was poorly staffed, buildings that were sloppily built, prices that were too high for the services rendered, airline costs that were prohibitive (it was cheaper to buy a vacation package from Caracas to Miami, including hotels, rental cars and airfare, than it was to simply fly to Isla Magarita and stay in a hotel for a few nights), and an infrastructure lacking in the very basic requirements to maintain an international tourist trade. For example, by 1993, the large hotels

and resorts of Pampatar were experiencing water shortages as was the rest of the population. The hotels were forced to shut off their water for four to six hours every day in order to make ends meet. These were not quaint hotels that could explain such shortages as part of the island's charm, nor were they ecotourist oriented businesses that could appeal to their guests' sense of environmental responsibility. To have such problems only worked to sully the already beaten-up image Isla Margarita, and Venezuela in general had as an international tourist destination.

There are distinctly two, perhaps more, views or presentations of tourism on the island of Margarita. One is the presentation that tourism is the way to economic prosperity, and that the island can reach this prosperity if only a bit more planning and cooperation by all is initiated. This is the view of those with a stake in the industry, the tour operators, the rental car agencies, hotel and resort managers, restauranteers, taxicab drivers, and free port shop owners.

The opposing view is taken by those who work in the universities (even in the department of Hotelery and Tourism at the Universidad del Oriente, Nueva Esparta), the traditionalists and cultural preservationists, journalists, and even some in the tourist industry itself. This view sees Isla Margarita being exploited by international investment schemes who carry profits out of the country and who threaten the environment with poorly engineered megaprojects such as that by the Spanish investment group Once, which has swallowed up the valley of Pedrogonzalez, supplanting the mangroves with golf courses. This view holds that most of the tourist development, until very recently, has been fueled by corruption and payoffs

to government officials, such as the fiasco that was planned for the island of Cubagua in 1990 ¹.

In short, one view holds that Isla Margarita can only progress through the promotion and entrenchment of a tourism-based economy, while the other view sees tourism as an evil that if not done away with entirely, then should be restrained in an extreme manner.

The island has already lived through at least one depression where many free port stores went out of business and the flow of national tourists was cutoff due to the grim economic picture caused by the drop in oil prices and the subsequent devaluation of the bolívar. The businesses bounced back due to developing a new market, that of catering to international tourists. This was fairly easily done because foreign currency again was worth something in Venezuela. The first boom was made up primarily of Trinadians who were attracted by the low prices of merchandise offered in the stores of Porlamar. In 1985 alone, visitors from Trinidad totaled 17,914 arriving in 10 to 12 direct inter-island flights per week. This number is fully half of all the international tourists that came to Isla Margarita in 1985. The next big group of new arrivals were the Canadians and then those from northern United States cities. Tour operators also went "fishing" in European seas, and hooked the Germans onto the Margaritenõ market. Today the primary international tourists are the Canadians, the Germans, and

¹ This project, beautifully recounted by Gomez (1991), was to have turned the entire unpopulated island of Cubagua into an international resort of great exclusivity - even the majority of the staff would have to leave in boats at night. Talk about enclave tourism. The developers of the proposed project was a consortium of Japanese, Spanish and Venezuelan investment groups, working in concert with a high-ranking Venezuelan government official and the mayor of Punta de Piedras, the town closest to Cubagua. All sorts of concessions were to be made to the project, such as liberty from taxes for a set period, etc. The whole project would have been a human and ecological disaster. It was finally abandoned due to the local, national and international outrage it engendered.

the British. I am unsure as to why the U.S. market has not been exploited more.

Because of this shift in emphasis from the national, or Venezuelan tourist, to the international tourist, changes in hotel construction and location have occurred. Hotels are now more full service resorts or time-share condominiums. They are not located in or around Porlamar, but are spreading up the eastern shore and then moving westward. This will have more impact on the local village populations of the interior, but it is too soon to tell just how the impact will run its course. In the case of one resort close to Juan Griego, run primarily for German tourists, the impact was as to be expected: the locals secured jobs as maids (many of whom, local gossip says, ran off to Germany with male tourists), gardeners, cooks and security guards. Positions of better standing, even as waiters or bartenders, were proscribed as most of the locals did not have the language skills to deal with the clientele.

The lack of preparation of Margariteños to work in the tourist industry is of great concern. Although there are many programs in existence to train young Margariteños to work in the various new businesses, it is a long process. Furthermore, it is difficult for many young people to obtain the capital to continue in school or pay for special courses. In La Galera, only two young adults that I knew of were taking training that would allow them to better take advantage of the tourism industry (one was studying accounting and computer programming, the other hotel management). As for the older Margariteños, I see little opportunities for them to take advantage of the new economy. They will be forced to remain with their traditional forms of making a living or become a part of the informal economy now swelling the streets of the cities.

Currently, Isla Margarita is suffering from a serious setback due to the extremely unstable political and economic position of Venezuela. The situation began in March, 1989 when there were massive riots to protest the price increases announced as part of the governments economic restructuring along International Monetary Fund guidelines. Things had settled down a bit until the fourth anniversary of the riots, when a coup was attempted but put down. Although the loss of life was not as great, the violence scared off many international tourists. Again, in November, 1992, there was another coup attempt, this one more bloody than the last. Coming at the beginning of the big tourist season, and right before gubernatorial elections, the coup attempt drove a knife into the throat of Isla Margarita's hopes of a good *temporada*. The number of tourists visiting the island dropped sharply, both internationally and nationally. International tourists were scared of the politically volatile situation, and Venezuelans were too unsure of what the future held to spend money on a vacation.

The drop continued in 1993, registering a decrease of 70% in hotel occupancy rates. Then with the impeachment of the president, Carlos Andres Pérez, and the subsequent elections, and succeeding economic crisis, from which Venezuela is still suffering, Isla Margarita is again facing a very serious situation. While I have not been there since late 1994, my friends in Punta de Piedras have told me that life is extremely difficult. Inflation has eaten away at incomes steadily: a kilo of powdered milk can double in price overnight. There has been a shutdown of the exchange market for dollars, and this has severely limited what the importers in the free port can now import. Larger multinational corporations can now not get their profits out in dollars, and bolívares are worthless outside of Venezuela. American Airlines has recently announced it will suspend all flights to Venezuela later this year due to

currency exchange problems. American Airlines is one of the larger carriers to bring tourists to Venezuela, and hence to Isla Margarita.

In conclusion, unless the national economy improves rapidly, and the political situation stabilizes, Isla Margarita may once again face years and years of solitude.

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO: THREE WORLDS, ONE ISLAND

The Outcomes of the Transformation

In the first part of this study, I have recounted the story of how the population of Isla Margarita had arrived at being a free port and national and international tourist resort. That was the process, but I told little of the substance, nor did I analyze any of the cultural and economic impacts the changes have had on the daily lives of the everyday people, the people who Eric Wolf has referred to as the "people without history," (1982). In the chapters that follow I will show what the effects of the new economy on island life have been.

In order to illustrate the changes, I must jump into a swirling morass of past and present, weaving my way back and forth through the years. No social, cultural or economic change is so complete that the past traditions are completely wiped away and people begin with a blank canvas on which to paint their new lives. Much of what existed in Margarita fifty years ago exists still today with only slight modifications due to modern amenities such as electricity and running water. These modifications have resulted in a blended culture, the outcome like the popular mixture of coffee and milk that so many drink in Venezuela - *marrón* - where the coffee is only tempered with milk and never loses its dominant flavor. I see the older traditions as the coffee, and the new additions, the milk.

The past traditions are upheld in two ways: in the daily lives of older islander men and women who came of age before the development of the free port; and 2) by those who live physically at a distance from the larger commercial and tourist centers of Porlamar and Juangriego. The elderly, being active members of the still predominant structure of extended family, influence younger family members through story-telling, passing down verbally traditional beliefs and practices. Those that live at a distance from the "centers" of Isla Margarita also preserve the past simply by having less access to the present: the goods and services that come with urban development. Thus the island is a material and cultural blend of the past and the present, and follows Redfield's 1960's description of big and little traditions.

In Chapter Five I begin the description and analysis of change on Isla Margarita looking at the effects on the material culture of Margariteños: housing, diet, television, and other material goods. In Chapter Six I continue the analysis by examining water and electricity supplies, transportation networks, and the serious increasing inability of the island to provide for islanders due to growing population pressures.

Chapter Seven deals with the impacts of the new economic structures on the household itself: the nuclear family, the kinship networks, and gender roles. Chapter Eight will describe the most important ways islanders have earned a living in the past, and how these economic subsets continue to adapt or be left by the wayside and supplanted by the newer forms of commercialism and tourism.

Chapter Nine continues to explore the consequences effected by tourism and commercialism in the areas of religion and politics.. Particular attention will be given to the island's governor's electoral race of 1992, as it

serves as a vehicle to explain the deeper significance political and economic corruption plays in daily life.

I conclude the study in Chapter Ten, "One Island, Many Margariteños," where I will show how the cultural mechanics of the old Isla Margarita has now blended with the present, giving rise to a distinct cultural complex manifest in what will be called original Margariteños. The future of Margarita, embodied in what I term the "new Margariteño," will be discussed in the last section of the chapter.

My data comes primarily from three sites: Punta de Piedras/Las Marvaes/Las Mercedes, La Galera/Juangriego, and Porlamar and was gathered during 1992. However, I have added in other data to recount the events that have taken place in Venezuela and on Isla Margarita since my "official" end of fieldwork in December 1992. I continued to gather data while living on the island until August 1994, and returned briefly in November of that same year.

CHAPTER 5 THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF DAILY LIFE

House Structures and General Household Material Culture

The analysis of the changes that have occurred in house construction and of the various structural forms that exist contemporaneously illustrates in a basic way how the role of economic class differentiation has played out on the island. Such differentiation is one of the major results of the shift from an agricultural and fishing economy to one based primarily on commercial exchange of goods and services among the sphere of tourism and the free port. Such literal structural analysis also helps to untangle some of the cultural beliefs held by "new" and "old" Margariteños, and serves to illuminate how changes in the economy provoke changes in the daily lives of the islanders.

Housing

The house structures of Isla Margarita are simple affairs that have resulted due to environmental exigencies and economic constraints. The environment of the island, as noted previously, is tropical, being very hot and for the most part, very dry except for short rainy seasons. Margariteños have thus strived for house forms that will alleviate some of the omnipresent heat of the tropics while using what materials were handy on the island.

Very few, if any, houses have been constructed of wood, a building material quite scarce in this desert climate and also subject to the problems of termite infestation ¹. Until the end of World War II the majority of houses on the island were constructed of *bahareque*, which refers to both the building method and material involved. According to McCorkle (1964:56) the house's framework would be constructed of:

lashed poles to which [are attached] smaller vertical poles and, horizontally, lengths of cane, lashed or nailed on in threes. This framework is filled up and plastered with a mixture of earth, water, straw, and sometimes dung.

Rarely would plaster be applied, and so the house walls were subject to both the moisture brought during the rainy seasons and if close to the coast, the incessant salty sea breezes (*salitre*). But construction and repair were inexpensive and all the materials were available locally. The roof was most often made of palm thatch, or when affordable, cane lashed tightly together and covered to the outside with tiles.

The houses of the poorest Margariteños were of two designs, the *rancho* and the *bohio*. The first, the *rancho*, had been favored mostly in fishing communities for their cheapness and rapidity of construction. Instead of *bahareque*, it was a palm thatched and lashed pole construction with a packed earthen floor, and having the shape of an A-frame structure (see Figure 5.1). During the dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez (dates), *rancho* construction was discouraged as being unsanitary, and many villages' dwellings were completely torn down. In their place were constructed small

¹ Even today, in the mid-1990's, when there is certainly enough capital available among the island's new upper class, wood is not used as a primary house-building material. If it is used at all, it is for finishing off an area in a decorative manner.

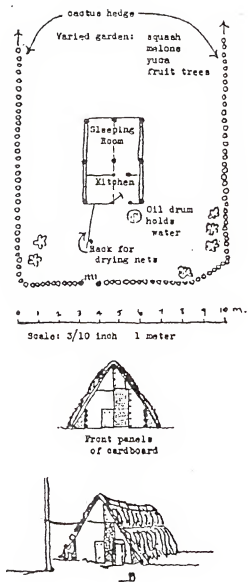


Figure 5.1 Rancho House Style

and identical concrete block houses. The majority of these houses still stand, and are much larger, having been added on to over the ensuing years.

Ranchos are still in evidence on the island of Cubagua and but are only inhabited by fishermen on a temporary basis. The thatch has given way to whatever pieces of plywood, corrugated asbestos, reinforced cardboard, or castoff (sometimes stolen) highway signs and political campaign billboards.

Ranchos are also seen more and more on some of the outlying hills of Porlamar and Pampatar, where poor mainland immigrants, mostly working in the construction trade, have squatted and taken up residence. These *ranchos* are notoriously unstable and during the heavy December rains of 1991 many of these flimsy structures were washed away in small landslides, causing a few deaths and numerous injuries. While there were no statistics available as to the numbers of squatters, the problem of a growing underclass on Margarita has evolved with the the blooming of large hotels and resorts. The apparent attitude of the government is to ignore the hillside inhabitants, or to blame them for every social ill now experienced on the island, from illegal immigration from Colombia to pickpockets to an increasing drug trade. The topic of a lack of appropriate housing will be further addressed below in the section on the "land squeeze."

The second type of traditional and lower class dwelling was that of the *bohio* (Figure 5.2). The main building material of the *bohio* was *bahareque*, instead of a pole and board arrangement, and the roof was usually of tile. Many of these *bohio* structures are still standing and lived in throughout the island; others are only partially erect--at least one *bahareque* wall may be seen whereas the house's other walls have been replaced through the years with less labor intensive concrete block.

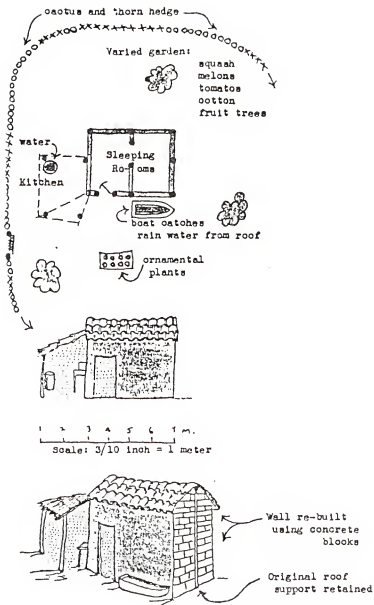


Figure 5.2 Bohio House Style

Characteristically, both the *bohio* and *rancho* are very small dwellings, and their interior space is unspecialized. A *rancho* is normally a one-room structure encompassing the sleeping, sitting, dining and cooking areas. The *bohio* differs in that its kitchen area is usually located in a leanto affair outside the main dwelling.

Beginning in the late 1940s, due to increases in personal income from work sought in the petroleum fields and an upsurge in contraband trade, concrete blocks became the building material most sought after. Concrete block continues to be the most common housing material among all economic classes of Margariteños. Only the embellishments and finishing of the house distinguishes one's socioeconomic position.

Well-to-do islanders will often begin with block construction for the basic "framing" of the house. The walls are then plastered carefully inside and out, tile floors are laid over poured concrete, and the roof will be of tile also. These houses have quite a different look and feel than houses of less fortunate Margariteños.

The poorer islanders employ concrete block construction with a corrugated abestos or tin roof. The interior walls may be plastered or not, depending on a family's income. All recognize that plastered interior walls are desirable. The exterior walls may or may not be finished (plastered), again depending on the family's financial state. Here an interesting compromise is reached. Only the house's front wall facing the street is finished, leaving the side and back walls bare concrete blocks. I would estimate that approximately 70% of all houses on the island are as such. I have inquired extensively but no one can give me an answer as to why this practice is followed (in fact, many islanders did not even notice the discrepancy until I mentioned it). I have developed two hypotheses to explain this oddity: 1) Lacking the

funds to plaster all the exterior walls, only the front is done, as it is the part of the house most often viewed by the public; or 2) in the towns, houses are built flush together sharing the interior side walls or connected by one solid front wall. Inside the front wall usually lies a courtyard. Therefore, to the passerby, the side walls are hidden and there is no need to finish them, as the side walls have become interiors walls for two houses. It is possible that the owners of freestanding houses plan to connect their house to a neighbor's in the future and so see no need to finish the exterior side walls.

The older houses, constructed before the free port in most instances, have two to three bedrooms, a sitting room (which is rarely used, usually only for formal company or in the case of a death in the family and the body will be laid out here), and an all-purpose area (See Figure 5.3). The kitchen is usually a structure detached from the main house and made of lower quality materials than those of the main building. The arrangement of the rooms and back and front doorways remind one of what were known as "shotgun" houses in the southern United States: a long and narrow house with front and back doors so lined up that one could shoot a shotgun through the front door and the bullet would cleanly leave through the back door. Actually, this probably facilitates the flow of air through the house.

Ceilings in houses are relatively high, with older houses having the highest ceilings. The height of the front and back doors are correspondingly tall, both characteristics addressing the need to enhance air flow in a hot climate. More recent houses have added indoor ceilings of elongated and square ceramic tubes (*tabelones*) laid flush together and supported by thin steel beams, replacing wooden poles or 2x4 lengths of wood.

Windows are relatively few in the average house, due to cost of window-panes and mostly, in the dryer island zones, to keep out the almost

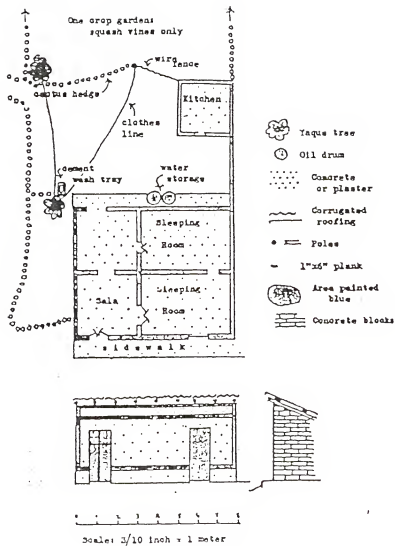


Figure 5.3 Older, Pre-free Port "Ideal" House Style

incessant fine dusty sand (*tierra*) that blows and swirls everywhere. Until recently, windows were covered with shutters that were opened outward during the day. At night, the shutters were closed but the slats were left open to allow the breeze to enter. Such shutters were then replaced by glass window shutters that simply opened and shut but were permanently fixed to not open outwards. In 1994, Margariteños seemed to have been hit by a craze for solid pane glasses windows that slid open and shut much like a sliding glass door. Even those that can not afford to install the windows right away will at least buy them and store them, waiting until they have enough money to have the work done.

Islanders fondly recall that as recently as twenty years ago no one had locks on their doors and everyone slept with their windows open to let in the night breeze. After the coming of the free port, crime--mostly that of robbery--increased enough to induce islanders to not only bolt their doors but to put metal bars (*rejas*) over all their windows and add metal-bar outside doors. These bars are usually considered a part of a house's embellishment, and are often designed in various curlicues and geometric patterns. Again, such bars do not block the windows and allow the breezes to enter the house freely. Screens are rarely, if ever, employed.

The other house structure variation is what McCorkle (1964:59) called the "ideal house" which was once common mostly to Porlamar but since the 1960's and 1970s has become widespread over the island. It is larger overall than other houses, having a large sitting room, 3 or more bedrooms, and a dining room and indoor kitchen. Again, the sitting room is not often used but rather the covered corredor that runs the along the bedrooms is used for family gatherings (Figure 5.4).

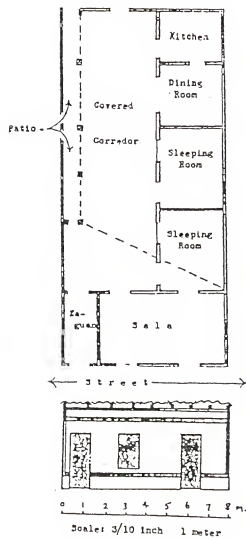


Figure 5.4 Modern, "Ideal" House Style

Anyone reading this may ask, "But where is the bathroom?" Neither McCorkle nor Orona make any mention of bathrooms. And most likely the reason is that until the past 20 to 30 years, most homes outside of Porlamar did not have indoor plumbing. If one lived on the beach, one could construct an outhouse that allowed waste to runoff into the ocean. Many present-day fishing households still employ this strategy, being mostly nonchalant about the dangers of contamination of the waters where their children play.

If one lived inland, one could construct a septic tank that has a floor of layered rocks and sand that lets the waste filter slowly in the deeper soils. However, most people resolved the problem of human waste disposal by simply going off into the "*monte*," or the bushes, to relieve themselves. This action is still a great source of storytelling on the island, for example, recounting what adventures with rattlesnakes and the like that one had while in the *monte* ².

Today all middle class houses have an indoor bathroom with plumbing. This consists of a regular ceramic toilet, a sink for washing, and an area for bathing that may or may not be separated from the rest of the bathroom by a curtain. I have not once seen a bathtub anywhere on the island except in large luxury hotels. I would attribute this to 1) the hot climate does not provoke one to take hot baths, and 2) the scarcity of water would make bathing in a bathtub a foolish luxury.

² In my many readings of ethnographies, anthropologists usually describe the type of shelter used by a given group of people but tend to leave out one area of human behavior: urination and defecation. Perhaps this is simple modesty on the part of many North American anthropologists. However, these two matters have a great bearing on the health of a community, both short and long term. Human waste carries not only unpleasant odors but such serious diseases such as colera and dysentery. How to satisfactorily dispose of human waste may not pose much of a problem in small hunting and gathering societies, nor in the Margarita of one hundred years ago. But more recently with the increased population, waste disposal (or "*aguas negras*" as they are known locally) has been and is a growing problem. It was especially serious during the colera outbreak in the early 1990's.

The existence of indoor plumbing does not promise that it functions. Water, or the lack of it, has always been one of the biggest challenges to living on Isla Margarita. One of the most important furnishings a Margariteño can hope to attain is a water tank (and sometimes an electric pump) where this precious fluid may be stored. Lacking the capital to buy a tank and pump, most households will amass an abundance of buckets and large metal and plastic drums in which to store water. When one needs to bathe, flush the toilet, wash clothes or the dishes, one needs to carry water to the bathroom from one of the numerous buckets or drums. The problems associated with the lack of water and its effect on the daily life of all Margariteños will be discussed below.

Inside the house, the type of furnishings depend heavily on the economic class to which one belongs. Lower class, poorer households have sparse furnishings, consisting mostly of a popular form of wrought iron chairs with plastic cord woven seats and backs, and perhaps a low quality formica and metal table and chair arrangement for eating. Sometimes there will be a small wooden shelf arrangement in one of the corners that holds little knickknacks like glass dolls, silk flowers, and gift souvenirs (*recuerdos*) given out at masses for the dead or birthday parties. Such arrangements are always made and embellished by the women of the household. In another corner might stand a small shrine in memory of those family members who have died. The shrine may include a picture of the deceased, a representation of the Virgin or Christ on the cross, and candles to be lit.

Bedrooms are simply furnished with a bed and an inexpensive dresser or free standing closet for clothing storage. Poorer families may store clothing in simple cardboard boxes. Only well-to-do families were noted to have built-in closets in their homes.

Traditionally, beds consisting of a mattress and frame were used more by women than men, the men sleeping in hammocks or on a thin, cotton or straw stuffed mattress laid out on the floor. McCorkle (1965:65) describes the situation in 1954:

Beds are purchased in Porlamar and have corded frames, sometimes covered by a straw sleeping mat that serves as a mattress. Beds are expensive but very important because they are much more comfortable than hammocks for purposes of sexual intercourse. Other members of the household regularly sleep in hammocks or on straw mats on the floor. Most people sleep in their clothes, though a few men have pajamas, and covers are used only during rare cool spells.

In 1992, the majority of Margariteños slept in beds, the exceptions being the fishermen of la Galera, who often slept in hammocks or simply curled up on piles of fishing nets outside their ranchos on the beach. However, hammocks were still used frequently for napping, resting, and sitting in almost all households, rich or poor.

The majority of the walls of poorer people's houses are often bare. However, almost every house of every social class on the island will have a picture of the island's patroness, the Virgin of the Valley, and a picture of the country's liberator from Spanish colonial rule, Simón Bolívar. Other decorations may be photos of family members, taken especially on occasions such as a graduation or in an important work position. If anyone in the family has any type of educational title, from graduation from a teachers' college to a secretarial school, these will be framed and placed proudly on the house's walls.

Middle class households vary from the lower class' more in quantity than quality of furnishings and embellishments. There will be more of the wrought iron with plastic weave furniture, and usually an upholstered couch

and chair arrangement for the sitting room. The walls will be decorated with reproductions of paintings, and the same framed diplomas will be hanging if there are *profesionales* in the family.

Kitchens and Diet

The kitchen area is another area which varies in design and content depending on the economic class of the inhabitants. As noted above, kitchens in the past were almost all located outside of the main housing unit, mostly to compensate for the heat. Today only the poorest Margariteños in more isolated fishing communities still have their kitchens outside. These outside kitchens are often dark and smoky constructs that are shared with dogs, cats and other smaller creatures. They are strictly utilitarian kitchens, with no decoration or frills. However, the majority of Margariteño kitchens are now located somewhere inside the house.

Until the 1960s, the majority of Margariteños living outside of Porlamar cooked on a clay platform stove that used locally gathered wood for fuel. This wood was gathered by the women and children a few times every week and carried on their heads to the house. Older women still speak of this task as one of the most arduous of their existence, and yet one that proved that they were strong and not used to coddling as they believe women are today. In the 1950's the use of kerosene stoves became more common, supplanting the wood stove. A decade later, propane gas became the cooking fuel of choice and remains the most common form of fuel used for cooking. Propane is sold in cannisters and delivered to each house by one of various companies on the island. While most lower and middle class Margariteños have modern propane gas stoves (four top burners and an

oven), the poorest (and often the oldest) inhabitants are still found to cook over wood fires.

The most basic and essential foodstuffs in Venezuelan life is the *arepa*, an unleavened round and thick (as compared to the *tortilla* of México) corncake that is toasted on a open flat grill (*aripo*)³. Arepas are eaten morning, noon and night, as an accompaniment to a meal, as a snack smeared with butter, or stuffed with cheese, meat or fish and eaten as a light meal. Until the opening of the free port most households had a *pilón*, a hollowed out upright log with a wooden pestle and a stone metate, or *pieдра para moler*, both used for grinding the fresh corn used in making *arepas*. These were often supplemented by imported metal food-grinders used to grind dry corn brought from the coast (McCorkle 1965: 67). McCorkle notes that in 1954 many households in Porlamar (always in the vanguard) were foregoing the home grinding of corn and buying already-ground maize.

Today the only corn that is ground by hand is that which is ground especially for some chickens and pampered fighting cocks. All families use store-bought, already ground maize, called commonly *harina de pan*, after one of the most popular brands, P.A.N.⁴.

Second to arepas is bread, normally made into loaves of two sizes, and almost always of white enriched flour. The U.S. mania for whole wheat bread has not caught on in Margarita, and the whole wheat breads that are sold I found to be dry and tasteless.

³ In Caracas, the national capital, wheat bread is now more popular than the arepa. This is probably due to both the more westernized world view of the city's inhabitants and the rhythm of the city, more fast-paced and less conducive to cooking from scratch.

⁴ In 1993, the national government admitted that *arepas* were an essential part of the Venezuelan diet and that to help insure against malnutrition, the *harina* had to be enriched with iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and vitamin A. All brands of *harina* are now so enriched.

Italy is the world's greatest consumer of pasta. Venezuela holds second place. As I have found no mention of it in earlier studies of the island, I assume that pasta as a dietary mainstay become common in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Margaritans will eat it as a side dish, but the favorite preparation is to serve it as a main dish of spaghetti. Their version of tomato sauce is ground beef cooked in a scant amount of tomato paste, placed on the noodles, and then they mix in tomato catsup and mayonaise to finish the sauce.

The daily diet of the Margariteños is generally well-balanced enough to not threaten malnourishment but is very high in sugar and fat. Nowadays, breakfast is either fried eggs, fried ham and arepas, or fried fish and arepas. In the days before the freeport, breakfast usually consisted of fish and arepas or *funche* (a sort of boiled corn meal dumpling). Today fried plantains are a common accompaniment at all daily meals. Margarine and mayonaise are used heavily as condiments. Often in families where both the man and woman work outside the home, breakfast is eaten on the street, buying fried empanadas and heavily sweetend coffee or soft drinks from vendors that set up on almost every corner.

Lunch, as in many Latin American countries, is a more relaxed and generous meal. Lunchtime for islanders runs from about noon to two or three p.m. If possible Margariteños like to return home for lunch. Here they will eat a larger meal, hopefully comprised of chicken or beef, fruit and again, arepas. After lunch, if one has time, a nap is in order.

Dinner is the least important meal of the day, often just consisting of an arepa stuffed with cheese, and more often some leftovers from the lunch.

Snacks are consumed with regularity by islanders, and their favorites are foods that are cold and sweet. Ice cream vendors are very popular, as are vendors of an island version of banana cake and *chicha*, a drink made of

white rice and milk, and sweetened with sugar. And every season brings its own fruits, be they *mamón* , a sort of green cherry with a large pit, to the ubiquitous mango, eaten plain or as puddings or ices. Among children especially, one of the most popular snacks of more recent origin, is a bottle of Pepsi Cola and plain small white bread rolls.

In the past, before the free port and the opening more transport to the island with regular ferries, the Margariteños diet was primarily fish and arepas or *funche* , a kind of boilded corn meal dumpling. Fish, if not fresh, was preserved by salting (one of Venezuela's largest salt flats is on the smaller island of Coche) would be eaten either fried or in a stew seasoned liberally with local vegetables. Numerous medical studies have linked the high rate of hypertension among Margariteños to the consumption of salted fish. There are also numerous accounts of islanders suffering from vitamin A deficiency during these years, but always as the mangoes and papayas came into season, the deficiency would be quelled.

Another common staple food other than fish was goat meat, still eaten but now more for special occasions. Goats covered the island in the years leading up to the Perez Jimenez dictatorship. They provided everything from milk and meat to leather for shoes and for export. In 1957, in response to a prolonged period of drought, thousands of goats were slaughtered by the National Guard. The reason: goats had so depleted the island's flora that rain was no longer attracted to Margarita. True or not, according to the locals, the rains began shortly afterwards.

Third on the list of most used proteins is chicken. In rural areas and in the smaller towns chickens were are still are raised on a small-scale by the women in a family. Sometimes a woman will have enough chickens to

eventually begin to sell them to her neighbors but this will rarely reach any type of volume to become a family-supporting household industry.

Lastly, Margariteños eat some quantity of pork and even less, beef. For the poor, the most common cuts used are the feet and ears, the latter normally used to season soups or pasta. Beef was rarely eaten until the 1970s, and now can be bought in three quality grades, the most inexpensive being used most often in stews.

Margariteño cooking relies heavily on two forms of food preparation: frying and stewing. Among the fishermen, smoking and grilling fish is also common because they tend to cook on outside fires at their fishing camps. In the houses, the lack of air-conditioning, especially in the kitchens, and the cost of propane fuel forces the islanders avoid using the oven for cooking. The only frequent times ovens are employed are during the cooler Christmas season, when turkey, goat and special *pan de jamón* (bread stuffed with ham) are baked. Even then, the large ovens of local bakeries or restaurants are commonly rented to prepare large feasts.

Later I will discuss the role of crop-raising on the island. Here I would only like to note the most common plants, vegetables and fruits eaten by islanders.

Alexander (1958:146) claims that yuca, both bitter and sweet, was the most common root/tuber crop both eaten and raised on Margarita. Then, in order of importance, come sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batata*), plantains and bananas, pineapple, taparro or calabash, ocumo (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), and sugar cane. McCorkle (1965:66) names approximately the same crops but drops any mention of calabash, which Alexander had noted to be in diminishing usage as it was used as a storage container, and the coming of canned goods were making taparro obsolete.

Other crops commonly grown and used before the free port were tomatoes, *aji* (*Capsicum*), squashes of various types, beans, tobacco (grown on a small scale and smoked by locals; cigarettes were imported or smuggled in), and watermelon. Fruit tree found on the island included mango, papaya, passion fruit, *nispero* (*Achras sapota*), pomegranite, coconut, dates and avocado.

All houses that I visited had an electric refrigerator. The refrigerator is, of course, indispensable for keeping foodstuffs fresh, but many households use half the space just to keep drinking water cold. Apart from the stove and refrigerator, a great many houses have an electric blender for making sauces and the ever popular fresh fruit juices. No lower or middle class houses visited were noted to have a microwave oven or dishwasher ⁵.

Another important component of Margariteño houses are gardens, or *solares* . Most Margariteños try to surround their houses with greenery. This varies in content and number depending on the house's location. If the house is in a closely built settlement like Las Mercedes in Punta de Piedras, the greenery is limited to house plants, usually kept in back of the house; this back area can range from being a fancy courtyard to a simple work and storage area, a place to string a clothes line. If the house is in an area where there is land available- even a few meters to any side--then there will be plants of bananas, fruit trees, perhaps tomatoes, etc. The larger of these plots are sometimes still referred to as *aconuco* , after the form of horticulture once common on the island (see below, Chapter 8). This *conuco* helps alleviate the cost of fruits and vegetables sold in the islands markets, where the

⁵ In fact, I cannot recall ever seeing a dishwasher anywhere on the island. The necessity of having a hot water heater and abundant water supply makes this appliance's existence in Margarita ludicrous.

majority of foods must be imported by truck and ferry from the mainland ⁶. Furthermore, when a family has an abundance of fruits or vegetables (but not enough to sell in the market) they are often given away to close friends, *compadres* or *comadres*, cousins, etc. ⁷ This is one form of food-sharing; the others will be discussed further below.

The Cultural Impact of Television

In his 1990 work, Prime -Time Society, Conrad Kottak concludes (195):

...No serious study of modern society can ignore the long-term effects of television. I became interested in TV because I saw all around me evidence of its effects. They seemed comparable to those of humanity's most powerful traditional institutions--family, church, state, and education...The results of [my] project have led me to a firm conclusion: In today's world, the home TV set has joined education, gender, skin color, income, class, religiosity, and age as a key indicator of what we think and what we do.

Until the mid to late 1960's, television was uncommon in most parts of the island. One informant told me that he remembers only three families in Punta de Piedras as owning TVs in about 1965. They were novelties, and attracted considerable attention, especially in the evenings, where small crowds of neighbors would gather to watch reruns of U.S.-made westerns and the just-beginning police dramas.

⁶ Again, the elaborateness of a garden will be limited by the amount of water available to a household. In the Peninsula of Macanao, an area of very scarce rainfall and mostly still lacking pumped-in water, few are the houses that have more than houseplants as adornment. The opposite is seen in an area such as San Juan, a town located in the moister valleys closer to Porlamar, and famous for its confections of mangoes. Of course, the elite have the best water supplies of all, even in the most arid regions, as will be explained later.

⁷ Unlike in the USA, where those with a green thumb are often avoided by friends who want no more free zucchinis or tomatos, such gifts in Margarita never go unappreciated. Someone will always take the produce and use it for a special sauce, or fruit to make a special candy. After such processing the product is again redistributed among friends and family.

Orona (1969:350) in his study of Punta de Piedras in 1964, notes only that "several" families have television sets. But how many is several?

I was informed repeatedly that with the national economic boom in the 1970's brought on by rising world prices for petroleum, coupled with the opening of duty-free stores in Porlamar, gave almost every single family the opportunity to buy a television set. And buy they did. People in Margarita bought Sonys by the shipload: sons gave TVs to their mothers, daughters bought them for their grandfathers. If there was somewhere to plug them in, somewhere that had electricity, there was a TV.

This is a disturbing realization to someone who is trying to sort out the effects of the opening of a freeport and the promotion of tourism on the local populations. Until further research can be done, if it can be done now at all, the question of how much TV has influenced cultural change on the island versus how much change was spurred by other changes cannot be adequately answered. Still, there is room for some broad speculation.

The majority of the television programming in the early 1970's was of two types: that of programs produced in Caracas and that of programs produced in the United States, and less often, Spain, Brazil and México. Certainly Margariteños were not so naive at the time to be completely shocked at the content of programs, but it must have taken a toll on the average islander's consciousness. I would hypothesize that television had the following effects:

1. Television has encouraged islanders to identify more with the nation of Venezuela. National politics can be observed first-hand, and much of the programming in the past came from the national television channel, which focused much of it's attention on Venezuelan history and culture.

In 1992, during my fieldwork, there were two attempted coups by the military. During each uprising, which were confined to the capital and larger industrial cities of the mainland, the events were broadcast over the national networks, often live. The uprising of November 27, 1992 was the most extraordinary: Channel 8, the government-supported station, was captured by rebel military who broadcast for three hours live to all of Venezuela, including a tape of Hugo Chavez, the leader of the last uprising, the tape having been smuggled out of his prison cell.

Furthermore, during the elections of December 1992, the forced resignation of Carlos Andres Perez in 1993, and the presidential elections of December that same year, the television was the best source of up-to-date results and protests. People were fairly "glued to the screen" at these times and what was broadcast was a continual source for heated and/or amused discussions among islanders

One of the most popular shows in all of Venezuela, as far as anyone could recall, was a *telenovela* called "Por Estas Calles." Loosely translated as "In These Streets," the show was filmed on location, mostly in Caracas, and began after the coup attempt in February, 1992. It took the controversial political and social issues and events of the day and built them into a story. If a judge was convicted for conspiracy and corruption one week, Por Estas Calles had it written into the show within days. The show toned down nothing, and at various times the director was threatened with arrest, the TV station shut down, or other threats made by the current government. This of course, only increased the show's popularity. While again I have no concrete proof, but I feel sure that Por Estas Calles was instrumental in raising the people's consciousness - enough to effect great political changes by the end of

1992. By the spring of 1994, the show ended, claiming the cast and director suffered from too great burn-out to continue.

In general, TV in this instance has served to educate and to foment the oft-elusive quality of nationhood in far-flung regions of the nation-state.

2. Sexual behavior itself is obviously not taught on the air, but I would hypothesize that new sexual mores have been introduced via the television set. Mostly this has come about through the broadcast of *telenovelas*, or soap operas. Such programming, as noted above, often comes from Brazil, and is noted for its suggestiveness or blatant display of sexual encounters. These shows also frequently portray average people having very active and open sex lives, and this is not lost on the average viewer in Margarita. I would think that the greatest impact is on the adolescents, who are also avid fans of the *telenovelas*. No particular effort is made by parents to restrict viewing, and while the national government has a system of rating shows for excessive sex and violence, I never noticed anyone pay any attention to these warnings.

Admittedly the connection between increased TV viewing and increased sexual activity at a younger age is tenuous, it is at least worthy of consideration.

3. Television viewing has heightened consumerism and simultaneously raised expectations among the majority of islanders. As in the United States, Venezuelan television is heavily seasoned with advertisements for a myriad of products, from household cleaners to luxury cars to real estate offers. The same psychology is used to get people to buy a product: the product will make you well-liked, sexy and respected among your peers. If you don't have the product you are hopelessly out of date and undesirable. However, with the collapse of the national economy in the mid-1980s, and an intensifying economic crisis in the 1990s, those who can afford

the "necessary" goods are fewer and fewer in number. This has served to increase class consciousness and class conflict by clearly and visibly showing who has the means to be "desireable" and who doesn't.

Still, the expectations of someday being able to acquire such material goods and well-being has not decreased with declining buying power. As I will show in the chapter on the changing economies of Margarita, the majority of surveyed islanders still expect their economic position to improve in the near future.

In the following chapter, I will examine how tourism and the free port have further changed the daily lives of Margariteños by analyzing what I call the "amenities of modern life." These amenities include such basic services such as water service, sewage disposal and the availability of land on which to build one's home.

CHAPTER 6 THE AMENITIES OF MODERN LIFE

Water

Water, or the lack of it, can be seen to be one of the defining and essential characteristics of life on Isla Margarita. It affects all aspects of life on the island, from religious celebrations of miracles, to tourism, state politics, and even household harmony. When I conducted my research, I found the question of water to be so essential to the understanding of the island that I would classify it as one of the few characteristics defining Margariteño ethos.

During pre-columbian times, of the three islands of Cubagua, Coche and Margarita, only Isla Margarita was inhabited. It was the only one to have a sufficient water supply to sustain a human population. When the Spaniards arrived and discovered the abundant pearl beds surrounding Cubagua, they insisted on settling on that barren island, bringing their water either from the mainland or Margarita. With the collapse of Nueva Cadiz, the settlement was relocated to Isla Margarita.

As noted earlier, Isla Margarita is a very dry tropical island. Because of specific weather patterns and the gradual deforestation of the area, drought and water scarcity have guided and defined life for the Margariteños. Particularly intense droughts are even named, and the elders remember their life events by whether something happened before, after or during a drought year.

The island had a few seasonal rivers, *riachuelas* , which became but streams in the dry seasons. Most of the water for consumption was drawn from what are called *pozos* or naturally occurring wells. These were geographic features that were more than just utilitarian—they served as social gathering spots, places to refresh oneself, gossip, and flirt, while drawing water or washing clothes. Margariteños also constructed artificial wells and catchments to hold water. They also rigged all sorts of rain gutters on their houses to catch and divert rainwater into large storage cisterns or sometimes into unused *peñeros* , or wooden fishing skiffs.

According to Salazar Franco (1986:36), the "odyssey" did not end there: there was the problem of moving the water from the wells to their homes.

They used beast and persons to transport water in however many containers they possessed. They walked distances and more distances in order to be able to get water. The carvans were never-ending in the day as well as the night. On the backs of burros, mules or men barrels and gourds were loaded. The men went from one place to another with barrels and pitchers on their shoulders as if paying a pittance. The women went equally with pitchers and barrels, carried on their head or with *mapires* (woven reed bags) full of gourds, supported on their backs, which obligated them to walk with firm steps and a slight forward inclination.

Such behavior continued up until very recently--perhaps the 1960's in more remote areas. The *pozos* were replaced by public fountains in towns and villages where women would go to fill their water buckets. This was the situation in 1965 in Punta de Piedras (Orona 1967:9) and in the late 1980s in other outlying areas as noted by Cook (1992b). As the population grew, obtaining an adequate water supply became even more of a problem. In the late 1950's (~1958) an aqueduct was constructed carrying water from Cumaná on the mainland to Isla Margarita. Later (the mid-1970s) a second aqueduct

was constructed. There are also four dams placed around the island to hold the water and gather what rainfall occurs over Margarita. These were wonderful solutions, but only temporarily. By 1971, just three years before the coming of the Free Port era, the first aqueduct was already insufficient. And just because the water came in a pipe to the island did not mean it would get to every village on the island. And even if the piping was available and in place this by no means guaranteed that water would course through the pipe. Today such shortages or complete lack of water, as in the marginal fishing villages of Macanao, are solved by buying water from tank trucks that run the breadth and length of the island. A whole large tank cost Bs.1,500 in 1994. Oftentimes families or a neighborhood block would split the cost of a "truck" but this frequently led to arguments about whether or not one family was hogging the water, etc. I witnessed at least three physical confrontations between women who each claimed the other was unfairly taking water either by not paying or by taking more than her share.

The only way to ameliorate this problem of water is to buy a large water storage tank and have it mounted either on the roof of the house or to construct some sort of tower so the water would flow by gravity pull. In Porlamar and other larger towns, the majority of the house have bright colored fiberglass ball-shaped tanks mounted on the roof. Persons with more money can afford to sometimes put their tanks underground and have any electric pump lift the water to them ¹

¹ While this was a splendid solution used in the apartment building in which I lived in Porlamar, it too suffered from the frequent and long electrical blackouts experienced all over the island. No light, and no water either.

Table 6.1 Population Served by Water and Sewage Lines, 1982-1989

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Population Served by Water Lines (in thousands)	157.8	186.1	193.1	200.7	206.0	211.3	217.4	227.4
Population Served by Sewage Lines	87.3	105.1	109.2	113.4	115.4	117.4	120.3	123.3
Paid Customers to INOS	24,924	25,924	27,401	27,401	27,888	31,900	34,129	34,743

Source: Oficina Central de Estadística e Información, cited in XLVII Asamblea Anual de Fedecamaras.

Table 6.1 shows that by 1989, approximately 89 percent of all people on the island enjoyed some type of sewage and water connection. In Porlamar, 72% of the population had water service, 67% in La Asunción, 69% in Santa Ana, 78% in Juan Griego, Punta de Piedras had 63% of the houses served, 60% in Boca del Río, and on the island of Coche, 70% of the people had water service (FEDECAMARAS 1991:94). But once again it is necessary to stress that being connected to such services does not mean that they function. This is true both in the scarcity of regular water service and the efficiency of sewage treatment. For example, in Juan Griego, the sewage treatment plant has been intermittently out of service at least since 1992, and has been cited numerous times for dumping raw sewage into the ocean.

While Margariteños have adapted all different ways of coping with the scarcity of water, they are not enough to insure an adequate supply in the face of the exploding immigrant and transient population. When I was on the island there were constant water shortages in every area of the island at one time or another. Both Punta de Piedras and La Galera suffered almost continuously from a lack of water, although the *caseríos* of Las Hernandez

and Las Marvales, close to Punta de Piedras and the town of Juan Griego, close to La Galera, rarely suffered from shortages. This type of discrepancy in who gets water and who does not and when they don't is best illustrated by looking more in detail at the cases of La Galera and Las Mercedes/Punta de Piedras.

La Galera

The problems of water in La Galera first became notable when almost every afternoon a villager would sheepishly turn up at my door asking if they might use my shower "porque no hay agua,"--there is no water. I naïvely believed the first week this happened that there was just a "regular" glitch with the water supply, like one of so many where the water would just disappear for a day or so while repairs were made and then be back, sometime in better supply. I did not assume I was experiencing this because my little *casita* was hooked to a larger water supply. But as the days wore on, the people still came, towel slung over one shoulder, soap in hand.²

I discovered that there are two water mains that go to La Galera. One goes to the those who actually live in old La Galera, and the other runs directly to the tourist sector of La Galera. My house sat squarely on the frontier of that crucial division, and I partook of the water that was pumped to the beach's hotels and restaurants. Still there were times when I woke to no water in the house: if the landlady "forgot" to open my pipe, I was without water (she seemed to take pleasure in this). Also, there were times of true shortage at my end of the village and for the tourist businesses up the

² Regardless of what superstitious beliefs (McCorkle 1965:70, Kitner 1994) may have held sway in years past, Margariteños are now fully inculcated into the bath/deodorant fixation of the West. There is great worry about not smelling clean and perfumed, and this is reinforced through TV comedies, *telenovelas*, and commercials. So water scarcity or not, Margariteños will bathe every afternoon without fail, even if it is done in the ocean.

street. These were invariably during the three "high" tourist seasons: *Semana Santa*, or Easter Week, the summer vacations from public and private schools and universities in June to August, and the month of December and most of January, when *la fiesta* of Christmas and the new year seems to never end.

The water problem in La Galera proper was manifest in various ways. Overall, it is simply a problem of not enough water reaching the *pueblo* to fulfill the daily needs. When I first arrived in La Galera in March, the water arrived through the main at least once a day, and more often came continuously in a trickle. This was sufficient to fill the tanks of those that had them, or the barrels that the rest of the inhabitants kept available for water storage. But beginning in April, the water became scarcer and scarcer, and not just in La Galera. Shortages were felt all over the island. The cause was the high influx of visitors and tourists, mostly from Caracas and European countries--the tourist hotels, resorts and restaurants had an intense demand for water, and they would succeed in getting it. Most of the water then was flowing to the area in and around Porlamar. This event was simply accepted, shrugged off, and explained as a yearly event, nothing to be done, just endure for a couple of weeks. The official reaction from government spokespeople was that if the islander wanted their economy to develop, tourism was the key to development, and that islanders must be prepared for sacrifice in order for the future to be brighter. There was the implication that if one complained to much one was somehow a traitor to the goodness of Isla Margarita, the nation of Venezuela, and probably God.

But after *Semana Santa*, the situation barely improved. Water arrived at just barely a trickle and some days not at all. Officials at INOS (National Institute of Sanitary Works, or jokingly called the Instituto Nacional de Oídos

Sordos, the National Institute of Deaf Ears) claimed all sorts of things: that work was being done on the water lines, that a line had broke and was being repaired, or that the lines had filled with sedimentation and needed to be cleaned. No one in La Galera believed these explanations. All were convinced that the water was simply being shunted to those more influential than they: the tourists, politicians, and commercial sector of Porlamar. The Galerenses were becoming very sceptical of the "propaganda" about tourism, development and sacrifice. It must be remembered that this was close to the time after the coup attempt on the national government, and many Venezuelans had come to question everything their government, and any other perceived elite, would claim.

While all the houses of old La Galera had a hookup to the water main, the newer houses on El Cerro had electricity (some illegally and dangerously wired) but no water hookup nor did they have any sewage system. During my survey and census of La Galera, I posed the question, "What are your worst problems living in La Galera?" Of the 22 households surveyed on El Cerro, all named lack of water to be one of the most serious problems currently facing residents. The other problems listed most frequently were the lack of sewage line, and lack of electricity.

Some of the houses of El Cerro that are lower on the hill have access to hoses, but those who live in houses built higher up must carry water up to their houses in large plastic drums or smaller buckets. This is an arduous task, as the hill is steep and the drums heavy. During the high tourist seasons the water pressure is usually too low to rely on the hoses. If there's no water down below either then someone will go in a car and get water from Juan Griego and bring it back to their houses.

Many of the houses have bathrooms, but really no use for them as there isn't any running water. One can bathe in the bathroom with a bucket of water, but many people go below to older La Galera to shower with other family members in their houses. It's a common site to see people shaving or brushing their teeth outside their houses--lack of water and no sewage necessitate performing toiletries in public.

This is also a major health problem. As noted above, Margariteños in the past would go to the "bush" to defecate. As the bush has rapidly disappeared with the increase in population and the resulting increase in construction, people in the La Galera have been forced to use the neighboring dried up lagoon for purposes of defecation. Or they will borrow someone else's bathroom, but of the 61 houses I surveyed, only approximately 24 have indoor bathrooms hooked to septic tanks. Some have a simple concrete slab with a hole one squats over and then rinses the floor with water kept in a nearby drum.

When the rainy season comes during the hot summer months, the stench and flies caused by human waste (plus that from dogs, cattle, horse and burros) in the lagoon is often overwhelming. This is combined with the smells and flies from the garbage dump just over the hill to the northeast of the village³. Again at this time of year the tourists begin to arrive and the water supply diminishes. In August of 1992 I wrote in my notes:

Many people in La Galera were dead tired today because they waited up until two am. to see if the water would arrive. There has been no water in La Galera for 10 days now. A little trickle comes at night to some of the houses at the entrance, but most have none. the son of N waited up, but got nothing. H (an 80 year old woman) was asleep when I arrived because she got up

³ Sometime during the spring of 1993, this dump was completely bulldozed under, removing not only the source of so many flies, but a horrible eyesore.

in the dark to get water but hardly any came. Some people are buying water from the trucks.

Not having water to clean has attracted the flies in immense numbers. In one house that I conducted an interview, the dead flies covered the floor like a carpet, with the live ones covered everything else. The woman of the house was barefoot and was walking all over the dead flies, squishing them with her feet.

Laundry day is a major chore for the women, as it is in most parts of the island. Most families of lower to middle income have a simple one cycle washing machine. It is filled with water by hand, and then drained out of a door or onto the ground. Some of the poorer families still do their washing all by hand. As the water comes and goes in La Galera, some will take their clothes to relatives living in parts of the island where the water still arrives.

In mid-1992 construction was restarted on the sewage pipes to La Galera. The construction would go on for one week and then stop for three months, start for two days, then stop for the next three. When I asked some government officials what the delay was I was told "money." However, 1992 was an election year and the locals believed that the sewage lines would not be finished until the elections had passed and then the new politicians could take credit for them. The coming of sewage lines to La Galera was also given as the reason for not yet paving the streets on El Cerro: no use in paving the street and having to tear it up again when the sewage pipes were to be laid.

The final note about the abominable water situation in La Galera is a story of corruption. It somewhat explains why there is no more of an organized protest by villagers demanding better public services. It seems that almost two entire streets in La Galera had not, by 1992 received a bill for water services. Upon further questioning, the people explained that they had paid a startup fee when their water service was hooked-up. This amount, did not go

to INOS, but into someone else's pocket. Then this official "neglected" to enter the subscriber's name as an active account, therefore the subscriber does not exist, and therefore they are not billed. So while the household may enjoy free water, they also have no recourse to complain when the water goes away. They have tried and are told that they have no service, of course they have no water!

Punta de Piedras/Las Mercedes

Compared to La Galera, the town of Punta de Piedras and the neighboring barrio of Las Mercedes are in much better shape with regard to water service. The improved public services can be attributed to the main *raison d'être* of Punta de Piedras: it is the ferry landing for the island, and so caters to thousands of visitors coming and going each year. It is also the "county seat" for the district, thus it's politicians hold more sway in La Asuncion and Porlamar. Still, the inhabitants of both town and barrio experience severe water shortages at the very same times of the year as those living in La Galera.

All houses in Pta. de Piedras and Las Mercedes are hooked to the water supply. However, when the tourists are in low numbers, the houses in Punta de Piedras have running water almost every day, and at all hours of the day. This is not the case in Las Mercedes: they will have water every day but it usually only flows beginning in the late afternoon, around four or five pm.

Those families in Las Mercedes that have tanks have no problem in storing water. Those without, such as one family I spent so much time with, have to hurry home from work every day to open their spigots and fill up their drums. If the family decides to spend the evening "por abajo" with relatives, someone must go home and make sure the water drums are filled.

Sometimes someone forgets, and all hell breaks loose between the husband and wife.

The worst time for water supply in Las Mercedes is during Semana Santa, when the island is overrun with tourists, both national and international. In 1994, almost a week had passed without water. Disturbances occurred when water trucks would pass through the barrio and not stop to sell water to families. Finally one did stop (or was forced to stop?) and the result was chaotic: as word of the water spread like wildfire, everyone ran madly for any kind of container to hold water. Arriving at the truck, people, mostly women and children, pushed shoved and cursed at one another as they tried to get their buckets filled. The water was gone in less than a half hour, and those left out were none too happy.

There were also uncountable times during my stay when we would borrow a pickup truck and spend the afternoon carting water from Las Marvales, which lies in the path of one of the aqueducts that runs from the mainland and so usually has water all the time, to Las Mercedes. However, there were also times when the water supply was out at Las Marvales, and we had to resort to going to residents of Las Cuicas or El Orinoco to obtain water for cooking and bathing.

One of the worst aspects of the lack of water in Punta de Piedras and Las Mercedes was the problem of dust, or as it is known locally, *tierra*, or earth. "Hola Lidia, how are you?" I would ask my friend, and she would respond with exasperation, "Ai, Katy, there is so much *tierra* ." Lidia, who worked as head of personnel at the Fundación La Salle in Punta de Piedras, spent her entire weekends immersed in housework. Every Saturday was washday, from morning until often nine or ten p.m. During the dry seasons, which were also the peak tourism seasons and hence the times of acute water

shortages, the wind blew the fine sand of Punta de Piedras everywhere, making housework a Sisphian task. In order to combat the tierra, houses were kept closed up as much as possible, making the indoors like a furnace. Overall, the situation was unpleasant, frustrating and stressful. Had there been more water, the dust could have been dampened down. A more longterm solution would be the planting of vegetation to hold the earth in place, but this too would require a more regular and abundant water supply.

But while what has happened in Pta. de Piedras, Las Mercedes and La Galera is bad, there are many places on the island that have suffered more. The northern village of Guayacán experienced four months without water, not even from trucks. In Manzanillo, located just a few kilometers from some of the most elite international resorts of Playa El Agua, the water did not come for over a month. In Villa Rosa, a working class neighborhood that supplies most of Porlamar's service labor, people took to the streets to protest the lack of water in October, 1992, burning tires, closing the roadway, and burning one vehicle. Such protests became common in the coming month, until finally the regional company responsible for water supply, had to announce in the local press: *...Hacemos un llamado de conciencia a la colectividad para que abstengan de participar en acciones violentas porque las mismas en vez de solucionar el problema del agua, tienden a agravar más la situación* (We make a call of conscience to the people so that they abstain from participating in violent actions because such actions, instead of solving the problem of water, tend to aggravate the situation more) (Hidrocaribe, 1992).

Electricity

Electrical power came to the most populous areas of the island by the late 1950's. Again, the spread of electricity to Isla Margarita was a part of the

regime of Pérez Jimenez, part of the grand infrastructural works that were carried out throughout Venezuela at that time.

Still, in Punta de Piedras, the only town for which I have longitudinal data in this matter, electricity was a limited good in the early 1960's. The town's power plant only operated from six p.m. to 10 p.m. at night. After that hour, kerosene lamps were employed. As time went on, the "living night" was extended by longer plant generating hours. But no one talked about being inconvenienced by shortened hours of electrical power: life revolved around fishing and difficult household chores. Night was the time for sleeping, not for staying up late to dance, or read, or watch television.

Probably one of the biggest impacts the continuous availability of electricity had on islanders should have been the ability to preserve food in refrigerators. Up until this time, the diet of most village and townspeople consisted of a good deal of salted fish, done so to preserve it. With refrigerators, islanders could now freeze their fish, or keep it fresh without salting it. Even so, the plain economic reality of villagers in the 1960s and into the 1990s is that there is not enough household capital to buy enough food to worry about storing. Most households shop for the day's food everyday, and most of it is gone by the next morning. The refrigerator, in low to middle income island families, serves first and foremost as a very large water cooler to beat the dry desert heat of Margarita.

One final note about electricity on Isla Margarita: it is still very unreliable, especially during high tourist seasons and during the rainy seasons. While I never became accustomed to it, I learned to take in stride unexpected power outages that in Pta de Piedras would last from eight a.m. to six p.m. for days, or from six p.m. to 10 p.m. in Porlamar every night for a week. Often the island's electrical supplier, CADAPE (another butt of islander

humor and scorn), would announce in the newspapers the planned outages, but these times could never be counted on to hold true. The most common complaint heard about electrical outages was that one could not keep the fan going to keep away the heat and mosquitoes, and that the beer was warm.

Waste Management

Another problem on the island was the problem of garbage disposal. Papers, plastic bags, castoff tires, wires, cardboard boxes, plastic bottles--whatever a human being has no more use for--is simply cast off wherever. When one drives in a car, whatever a person no longer wants is simply thrown out the window. When I would protest to friends, they at first looked at me as if I were completely mad. Later they would simply wait til they arrived at their destination to dump their trash.

Despite public information campaigns to keep the island clean (and implied again, pretty for the tourists), Isla Margarita never ceased to amaze me in the immensity of its litter problem. I will never forget riding in a por puesto from Porlamar to Juan Griego and seeing in the distance one of the most colorful and beautiful flowering trees I had ever seen. But upon drawing nearer I was reduced to bitter laughter: the "flowers" were but innumerable colored plastic bags that the wind had impaled upon the branches of a long-dead tree. FEDECAMARAS, in their 1991 report, figured that only about 70% of the 140-180 tons of garbage generated per day is ever collected (1991:78).

The then governor of Nueva Esparta, Morel Rodriguez, in May of 1992, announced that the state and national governments had negotiated a contract with a Spanish firm, with an initial startup cost of 20 million US dollars, to construct a recycling plant on the island. I confess I know little of the outcome of this project. The only result I saw was the construction of a

concrete block enclosure, about a half a hectare in size, and a sign that identified it as the Centro de Reciclaje de Nueva Esparta. I never once saw anyone working there, nor any activity at all up until the time I left the island in August, 1994.

Telephone Service

Widespread telephone service on Isla Margarita is a recent phenomena, and outside of the major population centers, it is still an occasional occurrence. One of my informants from Punta de Piedras had never talked on a phone until he was eleven years old, which was in 1967. In La Galera, out of 60 or so residences, I counted seven telephones (not including the tourist establishments on the beach). There was one public telephone but it was hardly ever in working condition. I would simply walk to the town of Juan Griego if I had to make a phone call to anywhere.

There is also a great backup in telephone orders, so if one wants telephone service there might be a wait of a year or more to have a line installed. This can be circumvented by knowing someone in the telephone company: two families I knew in Las Mercedes had telephone service in a matter of days after submitting their request because they were friends of an official who was responsible for telecommunications in the presidential palace in Caracas.

Telephone service in Venezuela in general has left much to be desired if one is used to the efficiency of phone service in the United States. Problems include not having enough lines to service the demand, having old lines that constantly break down, corrupt workers, and out-of-date equipment. In 1992 the national phone company, CANTV (Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela), was privatized and service did improve somewhat. However, what has made the biggest impact in Venezuela are cellular phones

which are not dependent on CANTV but rather on private communications companies. Cel-phones have become the rage all over, and most business people will not go one step without their phone.

On a related note, Isla Margarita is still not reachable by computer communications such as the Internet. This supposedly is planned for sometime in the mid to latter part of 1996.

Transportation

The first automobile arrived on the island in 1908, starting the love affair islanders have still today with automobiles, trucks, vans, and motorcycles. This affair has been nurtured and fed by very cheap gasoline prices due to Venezuela's status as a chief petroleum producer and exporter. But this affair has its negative impacts on the quality of life experienced by islanders. First, while I do not have figures on the death rates, automobile accidents must be one of the leading causes of premature death in Isla Margarita. It seemed like every day someone was killed in a car accident; some families suffered more than others. One family I knew lost both a father and a son in separate incidents, and a second son was nearly killed in a third accident. Two factors seem to be responsible for the high rate of accidents: excessive speed and alcohol intoxication.

There are few transit police to patrol the roads, and while speed limits are clearly marked, rare is the islander who obeys the signs. I have carreened along at close to 90 mph, and sometimes more, in large buses, taxicabs and vans. Considering that many vehicles run on a lick and a prayer due to the expense of automobile parts, it seems amazing that there are not more serious accidents.

If one combines high velocity with the copious amounts of alcohol consumed by Margariteños, the result is too often deadly. Add to the speed

and drunkenness the practice of not wearing seatbelts because it marks one as a *faramallero* , or too egotistical, and it is easy to understand the high accident rate.

All these problems are intensified when the high tourist seasons begin. At such times, more than 80,000 vehicles crowd the roads, mostly filled with people who are on the island to *fiestar* , or party. Traffic jams become common, parking is made impossible in Porlamar, and tempers flare. The only factor ameliorating all the problems is that the road system on Isla Margarita is mostly well-maintained and none of the highways are particularly challenging. In 1989 the island had 598.4 kilometers of roadway, of which 65 percent was paved, thirteen percent was of gravel and the remainder were dirt roads (Fedecamaras 1991:53). Since 1989 the amount of paved roads have increased due to the actions of the governor, Morel Rodriguez, who had the roads paved all about the Peninsula of Macanao and had begun a new highway bypass for Porlamar.

Table 6.2 Types of Vehicles on Isla Margarita, 1970 and 1989

Type	1970	1989
Individually Owned Automobiles	2,530	17,999
Rental Vehicles ^a	783	2,961
"Collectives" ^b	48	74
Motorcycles	483	8,179
Cargo Trucks	1,380	4,506

Source: XLVII Asamblea Anual de Fedecamaras, 1991:53.

^a These include *por puestos* ,taxi cabs and other rental vehicles

^b government transport for workers, private companies transport, tourism vehicles and school buses

Only about one third of the island's households own an automobile; the rest travel to work, school and marketing by public transportation. Public transportation for middle and lower economic class Margariteños comes in two forms: the *microbus* or van, and the *por puesto* , literally "by the position." The latter are some sort of car or station wagon and one pays for your seat, or *puesto* . In large cities like Caracas, large buses also fit into the scheme of public transportation. But in Isla Margarita, where the distances are not great, vans serve the purpose. Also, by having more vans and cars running set routes, the wealth is more fairly spread around. This is maintained by having each transportation line governed by an association of the drivers, who admit new drivers and assign how many hours a driver works. If a driver wants to buy a larger unit, he must have this approved by fellow members of the association. These associations are referred to as *líneas de transporte* , or transport lines. Each has a name that usually refers to the origin of the line, but sometimes the line is named after a patron saint.

Rates are kept low by government regulation, however, *líneas* can band together and petition a rate increase. When this does happen, everyone who uses public transportation complains unceasingly. Such a rate increase in bus fares in February, 1989 was the final straw that set off the horrible riots against the federal government and resulted in somewhere from 300 to 3000 people being killed (the numbers depend on what source is used, the military or one of non-government organizations).

The other common complaints about the *por puesto* system on the island are that the cars are too few at certain times of the day and the year, that the hours of operation are not long enough, that security is poor, and that the

drivers are corrupt with regard to carrying out their government-subsidized contract to carry school children at half price.

At the rush hour in the morning and evening, the *por puestos* are full to overflowing. People argue and push and shove to get a seat. In order to get to their workplace it is often necessary for Margariteños to leave an hour to an hour and a half ahead of when they need to arrive. The rise in seasonal tourists has also put a great strain on the system in two ways: there are less drivers because they too are taking a vacation, and there are thousands more people waiting for rides.

It is also true that the operating hours of *por puestos* is insufficient. The majority of the lines that leave out of Porlamar, the largest hub, stop running around six pm. Service is severely curtailed on the weekends. For those islanders who work until eight or nine pm., as are the customary store hours in Porlamar, they must find some other means to get home at night. I personally had this problem when teaching English classes in Porlamar and living in Las Marvaes/Punta de Piedras. I would leave class at eight p.m. and run to the stop, hoping all the way to get on the last microbus to Punta de Piedras. When I was unlucky I would be forced, along with others in the same predicament, to ride with a *pirata*, one of the drivers who went against association rules and drove after hours. The fare would sometimes be double or triple the set rate, and the ride much longer because the "pirate" usually took everyone he could fit in, causing the way home to be circuitous. No one could complain—you either accepted the "pirate" or you walked home alone in the dark, a dangerous proposition.

Much of the problem of short working hours has been caused by another problem, that of security. Drivers claim that it is too dangerous to work at night, that the towns and cities are being overrun by *malandros*, or

"bad boys" who will rob the driver. Of course, the problem of crime has been an indirect result of the growth of commercialism, tourism, and urban development.

The problem of using *por puestos* to transport school children is discussed below in the section on education.

If an islander has a regular income, that is, he or she is of the middle class professionals, they may have their own car. Among this income group, the cars are mostly older American models, particularly Fords, from the days when gasoline was still inexpensive. Auto parts are expensive and mostly imported: there are many machine shops dedicated to retooling transmissions and creating substitute parts when possible. From my experience, it is a miracle that these cars can sail down the road at the speeds they do; many of them seem to be held together by no more than wire coathangers.

The "new" *Margariteños* possess the new cars, the Mazda RX7, the Ford Bronco, the Jeep Cherokee, and some of the Japanese-made luxury sedans. These cars are bought most often in Miami and then imported to the island at great cost. Cars are a status symbol, and with the difference between a white 1973 Ford Conquistador made in Venezuela and a cherry-red 1994 Mitsubishi Eclipse is so vast, the car serves as a clear sign of who has wealth and power on the island.

In 1989 I noted very few late model vehicles on the island, and even in 1992 their appearance was rare. Then all of a sudden in mid-1993 there seemed to be an invasion of expensive new cars. One obvious explanation is that the government loosened import restrictions. Less obvious is that between 1989 and 1994, when the economy of the country took a deep drop for the many, but the what remained of capital was concentrated among many

fewer hands. The amount of money coming into Isla Margarita had increased greatly, but it was all held by a small percentage of the population. It was becoming fashionable for Caracas natives to have a second home on the island; the drug trade through the island was increasing; and tourism and the economic offshoots it sprouts was at an all time high. As will be seen below, the boom had begun to bust with the bank closures of late 1994, and the number of luxury vehicles has leveled off.

Finally, there are the taxicabs. Taxi lines--and again, the same word, línea, applies--are the direct outcome of the demands of tourism. I do not have figures on how many taxi lines there are in Isla Margarita. There are many. The largest and most profitable lines, in order of their importance, operate out of the hotel zone in Porlamar, the international airport, and Punta de Piedras. Being a cab driver is a lucrative career on Isla Margarita, and the families of cabbies live a decent existence.

Outside of land traffic, there are ferries and airplanes that are used to connect the island to the rest of the country. There are also, of course, the hundred of fishing boats that fishermen use to come and go between Isla Margarita, the mainland and the rest of the Caribbean.

The ferry boat landing is in Punta de Piedras. It has been there for decades, since the mid-1950's, but began in Boca del Rio, on the Macanao Peninsula. Previous to that time, goods and people were shipped in and out on large wooden cargo vessels, commonly known as *lanchas*.

Ferries were of two kinds: people and car ferries. The people ferries were paid for out of state monies, and were discontinued in 1993 because the governor claimed them to be a financial liability. Now the only ferries that run are privately owned by the company Conferry, whose owner, Rafael

"Fucho" Tovar was senator in the congress and was elected the island's governor in 1995 ⁴.

There was also another ferry that had begun service from the mainland town of Carupano to Pampatar. However, my sometime in 1993, the service had been abandoned, leaving the boat at the dock to be scavenged.

According to statistics compiled by FONDENE (1992), the average number of people per month to arrive by ferry to the island was 60,000. This figure seems a bit large, but when one considers how crowded all travel points are during the "high" tourist seasons, it may be a reasonable average.

Finally, there is the international airport of Santiago Mariño. It was federally owned and operated until 1992, when the state of Nueva Esparta took over its operation. At least six different airlines service the airport, three of them having international origin, one from Canada, one from Germany, and the other the Venezuelan line, Viasa, flying from Miami twice a week. All other flights originate in Venezuela, the vast majority from Caracas' Maquetia Airport.

The airport is small, but was in the phases of expansion when I left in 1994. It is like airports everywhere: busy and overpriced. It has added, however, a few business opportunities for Margariteños: there are always women outside selling *empanadas* and *arepas*, fresh fruit juices, or at Christmastime, *hallacas*. The taxi cab drivers do a brisk business, although some years have been better than others. All the car rental businesses, local and international both, have their biggest offices located there. But because the airport is so far away from any towns, there is much less presence of the

⁴ According to a conversation I had with someone from Punta de Piedras on 1/15/96, one project of the new governor will be to completely rebuild the area around the piers in Punta de Piedras, adding a new large pier and encouraging small tourist-oriented business to take root and grow. This, if it actually happens, will be the impetus for major cultural, economic and environmental changes in this small, traditional town.

everyday Isla Margarita in its environs. Only when one moves out of the carefully manicured landscape of the airport do the images of the island beset one. In my field notes from August, 1992, I wrote:

The por puesto was full, and as usual there was music. Most people seemed subdued, probably because it was early. I watched out the window and thought about how the the island would appear to someone who was visiting for the first time. If they came from the airport or the ferry, and headed to Porlamar, they would have to see what I saw:

Scraggly cacti, and brownish-green landscape. Houses of concrete block, some with gardens and flowers, some with fences of cactus. A pregnant woman in the doorway, holding a young child, looking out on the road, looking, waiting, looking, waiting for what? The sky is partly cloudy, and a hot desert-like breeze blows in from the southeast. The landscape is broken by numerous billboards announcing interior design firms in Hotel Bella Vista, or LA Gear tennis shoes ("No es un zapato, es una maquina"), Tiendas Don Regalón, banks, resorts, cigarettes--Belmont--always with young and vibrant youths scampering on the beach, and always, always liquor (I once counted over one hundred advertisements for liquor in the 22 kilometer stretch of highway between Punta de Piedras and Porlamar). A banner announces an upcoming concert by El Conde de Guachero and another for a *salsero*. There are mechanics shops and used tire businesses, all of concrete block.

The trash is ubiquitous. I'll never understand how there can be so many plastic bags floating around, grossly decorating the trees and cacti. Cans and plastic containers, piles of broken concrete, bottles, and things that have now lost their names.. I'll never understand why I seem to be one of the only people who is annoyed and saddened by this florescence of discarded bits and pieces of humanity.

To the north lie the mountains, now much greener due to the recent rains., They are beautiful, until you get close into to Porlamar and see how one of the smaller hills is being eaten away by the sand and concrete companies of Margarita. Margarita is eating itself, chewing off fingers to grow toes--the hotels and houses of various towns and cities.

Getting in closer to Porlamar the traffic thickens. The heat intensifies as the por puesto slows. People grow impatient in the heat, anticipating their stop so they can get a breath of fresh air. The por puesto winds into the narrow streets of Porlamar. People hang out on the street, drinking beer, chatting, working.

Some eat empanadas of meat or baby shark or cheese at the numerous stands, all run by women. The hot dog and hamburger vendors are all men. Why?

Drawing closer to the plaza the streets are full of shoppers, tourists and regular people coming to Porlamar for business, shopping, medical visits. There are also those who live there. A door in a wall is open; inside one glimpses the cool concrete floor, the greenery tended with care, the chairs placed strategically to catch the breezes. A refuge from the heat and sound of the city.

Getting off at the Plaza Bolívar affords no relief from the crowded streets. People jam up to the kiosk to buy the day's news, and only god knows why, for the news is never any good. Salsa blares out from a car, the tourists rest in the shade, the hucksters huck, the river is full of trash, the stores full of the season's discounts, the streets packed with taxis, cars and por puestos, their destinations written in white paint on the windshield. Heat heat heat. No shadows, just heat. The ocean is calm, and one can make out the sailboats at rest in front of the Hotel Concorde.

The Land Squeeze

Throughout Latin America, the shortage of housing, rural to urban migration, and a high birthrate is graphically represented by the populous shantytowns that ring the larger cities. In Venezuela they are known as *ranchos*. On Isla Margarita, the ranchos have just begun to be noticeable on some of the outskirting hills between Porlamar and Pampatar. When I first visited the island in 1989 there was no visible squatter activity. It was not until the spring of 1993 that I noticed the shanties' growing presence outside the city.

Their growing presence is indicated by the numbers given at the V Congreso Inmobiliario del Estado de Nueva Esparta, in 1993. According to Castro (nd), in 1971, ranchos made up 3.4 % of all housing on the island. But in 1975, one year after the opening of the free port, the island reported that 12.4 % of all housing were ranchos. For 1981, there were 5,500 ranchos,

and in 1990, the number grew to 8,600, or 12.2 % of the total. However, I am cautious about using these figures, as it is clear that the definitions used by census takers to define a rancho would be quite different from what many Margariteños would see as a rancho ⁵.

For example, in Las Marvaes there was an old beautiful house constructed of bahareque. It was situated up a small knoll and looked out on a beautiful panorama, and in the distance one could see the ocean. It was owned by a very old man, and one of his sons and his family shared the house. It was large, cool, and well-maintained. I walked by it almost every day, and every day I caught myself coveting that house. However, according to definitions used by the census bureau, the house was classified as a rancho because it was constructed of bahareque. The census bureaus will classify a house based on construction material; a Margariteño will classify according to the age of the house, who lives there, and how they live. To a Margariteño, a rancho is either for fishermen, or it is a dwelling constructed in haste with poor materials by immigrant workers from the mainland. For a Margariteño, the ideal way to be is to never let someone in the family go without food in their stomach and a roof over their heads. Therefore, a true Margariteño would not, could not, live in a rancho, because they have family to take care of them.

Housing shortages on Isla Mujeres are produced by three factors: 1) migration to the island; 2) the high birthrate among islanders; and 3) the simple fact that on an island the land for housing is finite. The nature of the migration process substantially produces the substandard housing now evident in Isla Margarita. Mainland immigrants who have been drawn to the

⁵ I also believe that the census' definition of what is a rancho has changed over time, and so again casts in doubt the reliability of the historical percentages.

island due to the growth of tourism live a precarious life. They hope to help build the new houses and hotels, scrub the floors and wash dishes in the new restaurants, maybe hit the jackpot in the new casinos. In the meantime, they must live anyway possible, and that very often means squatting on whatever land is convenient.

The ranchos are made of whatever material is at hand: cardboard, road signs, castoff tin sheeting, etc. There is hardly ever any plumbing, creating problems of sanitation. The ranchos are built on land that has not been seen suitable for other construction, such as steep hillsides surrounding the towns of Porlamar and Pampatar. The units are thus unstable and their very existence is threatened every time the heavy seasonal rains begin ⁶. The occupants are so poor that living closer to whatever jobs they might obtain saves the transportation costs. Life in the ranchos is miserable. They are the lowest of the low economically, and they have little hope for rising out of their deplorable conditions. As I write this in 1996, considering the grave economic crisis Venezuela has found itself in, I see even less hope in the immediate future for those people of the ranchos.

Over the course of most of 1992 I had the opportunity to observe the formation of one small rancho settlement. I had first noticed men sleeping in an abandoned building ⁷ and adjacent lot in early February. By the end of the month, there were four men living in the lot. They had constructed of corrugated roofing material crude lean-to shacks where they slept at night. Bit by bit their home grew. They obtained a small one burner gas stove to

⁶ In 1993 when a tropical storm moved along the Venezuelan coast, the ranchos of Caracas, also built on the steep mountainsides surrounding the country, were washed away, leaving thousands of residents homeless.

⁷ There are quite a few abandoned buildings of this sort in Porlamar, especially in areas developed in the past ten years. They are not so much abandoned as unfinished. The commonly held explanation is that most were begun with illegal monies, i.e., from drug smuggling, and used as a form of money laundering.

cook on and somehow hooked up water so they could shower in another little lean-to. At night, they had no lights, so sometimes built a small fire and sat around and chatted. They usually retired around nine pm. and were up before dawn and off to work.

Soon they had beds in their shacks instead of hammocks. They had cleaned the lot of debris and neatly piled it to one side. One man marked off a corner of the lot and started to prepare a *conuco*. By August of that year, they were approximately five to seven men and two women living in the lot. The *conuco* held banana trees and various other vegetables. There were two kittens and one dog with her litter of pups. Laundry drying on the line fluttered in the breeze. A simple kitchen area had been built and the women were usually found there. There was also electricity and each room of the lean-tos had a bulb hanging from ceilings. Someone had acquired a television and at night it was placed outside where all could gather around and watch the popular soap operas. I could only wonder how long this community of squatters would last, if they would be evicted, or just left in peace until the next wave of economic activity returns to the city.

As noted in Chapter Two, the annual growth rate in Venezuela and Isla Margarita is high at about three percent. Population density is another strong indicator of the "squeeze." According to the censae of 1926, 1936, 1941, 1951, and 1961, population density on Isla Margarita remained at an average of 65.6 inhabitants per square kilometer. But in 1971, the density jumps to 103.3 inhabitants, a presage of the coming free port. By 1981, the number becomes 171.5 persons per square kilometer, and in 1990, 229.3 persons are living in together in one square kilometer.

The case of La Galera illustrates well the difficulties islanders are facing in obtaining satisfactory housing. The root causes of the housing shortage are

in the high numbers of children in the average Galerense household and it the stark fact that La Galera is a very physically circumscribed area. There is the ocean to the west, tourism developments and marshland to the north, and a hill designated as a national monument lying the east and south (see Map 2).

Overall in Isla Margarita, the average number of persons occupying a home is 5.4, and in the district where La Galera is located, the number is only 5.1. But in 1992, according to the census I conducted of La Galera, there were almost 7 persons per house. This number is down from the 10 to 11 person per house average determined for 1981 (Asociación de Vecinos, La Galera, 1981). What causes the higher population density of the present and what caused the latter change to occur?

In 1980, residents of La Galera had grown tired of being ignored by the island's government, and bypassed by the spectacular growth occurring in and around Porlamar. Inhabitants were still without water or sewage service, and were experiencing serious overcrowding in their houses. They formed a "junta vecinal" or neighborhood association, to try to address these problems. They hoped that by forming a solid front they would have more influence with the state's governing bodies.

But considerate letters to the governor and other officials got them nowhere. No plans for housing were in the works, no plans either for basic services. The junta primarily wanted more land for building houses, and saw the empty lots on the northern edge of the village as potential housesites. As these lots had laid empty since anyone could remember, residents believed that the owner should be encouraged, if not forced, to sell. Although the lands were zoned for tourism, the junta felt that their needs were primary,

and tourism could develop further up along the beach, or at Playa Caribe, an adjacent beach just over the hill.

No response was forthcoming. Some blame the neglect on negative politics, a sort of revenge, some say it was just due to the fact that La Galera was not seen as important either economically or politically. But by January of 1980, the residents of La Galera had taken matters into their own hands and physically seized the desired lands.

"Habitantes de LG Invadieron Terrenos al Lado de la Laguna de Los Martires," ("Inhabitants of La Galera Invade Lands alongside of the Martyrs' Lagoon,") read the headlines on January 21, 1980 in the regional newspaper, *El Sol de Margarita*.

Because of the grave problem of lack of housing the residents of LG have decided to occupy lands and build houses on the occupied land. On 28 January the residents began to divide the land into parcelas (7m² by 15 m²), where about 70 families could live. All the families are supported by fishing. Wenceslao Acosta, Luisa Zabala, and Vicenta Hernandez are spearheading the movement. They are quoted as saying:

"Ya hemos agotado todos los recursos y medios para conseguir vivienda. En vista de que no nos prestan atención, la única solución es instalarnos aquí. Somos nativos de La Galera y tenemos derechos. Vemos que de todas partes, vienen extranjeros y gente de otras regiones, que construye su casa donde le parece y no les hacen nada. También, nosotros, margariteños, optamos por hacer lo mismo. No permitiremos tampoco que este lugar se llene de indocumentados, de colombianos que se aprovechan la situación. Esto es nada para la gente de La Galera."

(We have already used up all the resources and means to get housing. In light of the fact that they don't pay attention to us, the only solution is to install ourselves here. We are natives of La Galera and we have rights. We see that all over, outsiders and other people from other regions come, and they construct their house where they like and they don't do anything to them. We, too, Margariteños, opt to do the same. We will neither permit that this place fills up with illegals, with Colombians that take advantage of the situation. This is nothing for the people of La Galera."

El Sol de Margarita, January 21, 1980

The spokespeople of the *junta* also criticized the owners of the tourism developments on the beach, saying that they aren't doing anything to change La Galera into a true tourism zone. They also claim that instead of "empotarse las cloacas," (building a type of septic tank) they dispose of sewage by emptying it into the lagoon or ocean, and use the vacation houses for prostitution. Nor do they believe that these businesses help La Galera as a source of employment (these issues will be described and analysed in Chapter Eight).

"Todos somos gente trabajadora, que vive del mar, del cazón, de coro-coro, y que si no pescamos, nos morimose de hambre. Tambien merecemos que nos preste atención. No nos gusta vivir en ranchos, pero por necesidad no nos queda otra oportunidad."

The people taking over the lands began to move materials onto the disputed area in the following week. They cleared the land and began to unload concrete blocks to construct their houses. At least two women showed me photographs of themselves, taken at the site, standing smiling and triumphant, buckets and bricks in hand, ready to build their houses.

At that time in La Galera, no other houses had ever been constructed since those built during the regime of Pérez Jimenez in the 1950s. As noted previously, there were four to five families living in a single house, some having to sleep on the street as there was not enough room inside for all the beds or hammocks.

According to the newspaper, the land in question had an area of 23,000 square meters, and was sold by the Concejo Municipal of Distrito Marciano in 1968 to a man with the surname of Rodriguez. The intention of this sale was that the land be developed as a for tourism, but to until now, January 1996, it

remains empty. There was general agreement in La Galera that somehow there is corruption involved in the buying, selling and holding of this land. However, no matter how I tried I could not pin down any facts, except for courthouse records that show that the land sold had an area larger than what was later claimed by the government and that the official value of the land per square meter was higher than what the newspaper claimed.

With their actions, the people of La Galera had forced the regional government to take notice of their demands. Speaking of La Galera, the then governor, Pedro Luís Briceño, said that the people of La Galera should have "patience," and that he was getting ready to "dotar parcelas, con servicios básicos e instalacionse de baño y cocina. Por lo tanto, cosidero que...estan perdiendo tiempo, dinero, y esfuerzo en construir casas que van a perder," (to give out lots, with basic services and with installations of a bathroom and kitchen. As such, I consider that...they are wasting time, money and energy en building houses that they are going to lose,) ⁸.

Various government offices were contacted to determine if there were plans for improving the housing deficit in La Galera. From what I could determine, nothing was planned to ameliorate the situation.

It turned out that there was not anything in any national or regional budget for 1980 that addresses the construction of houses in La Galera. The newspaper, *El Sol de Margarita*, consulted with the heads of MINDUR (Ministerio de Desarrollo Urbano, or Ministry of Urban Development), Vivienda Rural (Rural Housing), SAS, INAVI, and Obras Públicas Estadales(State Public Works). The following are the results of those conversations:

⁸ This statement is very typical of a good portion of the political banter that ensues during election campaigns. Politicians make outlandish promises, changing them to fit the community, but when they actually gain office, little if anything is done.

Mindur: we have no plan, but we'll consider the case.

SAS: we have no plans and no budget for it either. In order to do something there must be land available for the people of La Galera to buy or develop, but since they claim there is not any land...

INAVI: we have no plans. because the district can't give land to La Galera, because there were never any *ejidos* in the area of La Galera.

The only plans that existed in any form for La Galera are those for the amplification of the government-managed beach area, plans which later (1992-94) became the basis for a long drawn-out corruption scandal.

Finally, when it appeared that nothing would give on either side, a solution was agreed upon. One of the sloping hillsides of the national monument for the Venezuelan Wars for Independence, El Fortín, which forms the western backside of La Galera, would be ceded to residents as home sites. A price was agreed upon, to be paid in installments, and parcels were measured off. A lottery was held, and each site was taken. Everyone, I was told, was very happy at the time, even if their home would have to be constructed on a hillside.

At the time I conducted fieldwork, most of "the hill's" (as I came to call it, after the Spanish, *El Cerro*) residents were without running water, sewage, paved streets, garbage pickup, and in a few cases, no electricity was available (this was taken care of by illegal hookups). Families were already crowding their relatively new houses, even though the average number of persons per household is less, at 5.4 per house, than it is overall in La Galera. The percentage of children--those eighteen and younger--occupying houses on the hill is at approximately 49% of all the hill's inhabitants. This alone leads one to predict, in consideration of the housing shortage in La Galera and elsewhere on the island, that the houses will only become more crowded as

the youngest grow up and become sexually active and/or bring home spouses to share the house.

Because of the high levels of stress caused by such severe housing shortages still found in 1994 in La Galera, many adult children are beginning to discuss leaving the parents' house before they are financially prepared to buy or construct their own dwelling, as was done in the recent past. The stress makes the couple move to a rancho, a house lacking in the very basic necessities. Some have already moved to a barrio called La Sabaneta, on the outskirts of Juangriego. This area is known for its lack of public services such as sewage, running water and electricity and high crime rate. The houses there are uniformly referred to as ranchos.

What has been tourism's role in this area of the life of La Galera? The impact has been very direct, and very negative. Very simply, tourist developments have tied up large tracts of land that are unavailable for housing, no matter how urgent the need. The island's government is dedicated to developing tourism, and appears to be willing to do so at whatever cost to the "original" Margariteños. There is little if any talk or thought given to concepts embodying ecotourism, or sustainable tourism development. What little discussion that has occurred is aimed at the Peninsula of Macanao, which is sparsely populated. It appears that the main part of Margarita will continue on its present course of developing mass international tourism, and to hell with the people and their needs and hopes and dreams for a better life.

This is the picture across the island: overcrowded living conditions for all but the very rich whose mansions look down over the tiny houses packed together along the every narrow street. In Punta de Piedras a smaller section

of houses was recently added in 1992, and those lucky enough to have their names drawn in a lottery moved in rapidly. The houses are teeny, of concrete block, and unfinished. No matter: every last one was snapped up and gratefully finished off, with many now being quite pretty with gardens and sitting areas brightening the small yards.

One of the problems now facing the community of Punta de Piedras will be where to construct new housing. As noted above there is a great problem with dust blowing everywhere, and yet the only place for new house construction is in the middle of one of the driest dustbowls in the area. People are actually building houses there, but design them with the windows only on the lee side of the prevailing winds.

CHAPTER 7 CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE HOUSEHOLD

In order to understand how the family, the household, and men and women relate to each other and amongst themselves and how the social structure has then changed with the coming of the free port and mass tourism, certain areas of Margariteño belief and behavior must be defined. These are, but are not limited to, the domains of *respeto*, the *compadrazgo*, male and female roles of *calle* and *casa* and the belief in the sanctity of the family. These domains have sometimes physical and always, of course, mental and behavioral manifestations among Margariteños. They also serve as convenient constructs with which to sort through gendered behavior among islanders. They are ideal types and codes of behavior that define how one should comport oneself in the community.

Respeto

In his 1968 ethnography of Punta de Piedras, Orona spends ten pages on the concept of *respeto*, or loosely translated as "respect." I will quote him here, in order to define the term, and then I will look at how the practice of respect has changed, and how this fits into the general changes initiated by the complex of commercialism and tourism.

According to Orona (1968:65-75), and with which I agree:

A simple translation of the word yields respect, reverence, regard, and/or consideration. When I tried to discuss the idea with some of the people, the general answer given to me was "Respeto is respeto." The idea is deeply rooted in their minds. It is used frequently in a range of situations. One can always hear the adults

reprimand the children by "*Muchacho, respeto!*" The little children in turn even use it on one another. For that matter I have even seen people use on their dogs. *Respeto* mediates behaviour between people. It governs the social etiquette among people. In this sense, *respeto* is the basis for certain structural features in the behaviour which gives us a key to understanding the larger social structure of the Margariteño people.

Orona claims that respect is determined by or based on age. Parents are granted the greatest respect, then siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and then other relatives. First cousins are always considered very close, almost a sibling, and this is reflected in the manner of address used, *prim'herman/a*, literally, "cousin-brother" or "cousin-sister." Respect is transferable, in that if someone in the family has a friend, the rest of the family will respect that friend as they respect the family member.

To this I would have to add that while this is true, with the elder person always commanding more respect from the younger, there is now the added element of social or economic class. I was often embarrassed by the demonstrations of respect paid me by women and men who were my seniors, simply because I came from abroad and was thus a guest, and because my educational background or financial position put me in a different socioeconomic class than, for example, the wife of a fisherman. I repeatedly saw this same deference and politeness paid to visitors from Caracas, higher-ranking members of the military, the well-to-do, and politicians (although here the sincerity of the respect is suspect, considering the popular view of the order of corruption in the political sphere in Venezuela).

This change in the ordering and interpretation of respect I see as a result of the newer and ongoing transformation of the social structure of Isla Margarita, from an almost uniform homogeneity in the culture and economies to one of distinct stratification based primarily on differences of wealth. In the days before

the free port, while there was indeed a wealthy class, primarily living in Porlamar and La Asunción, their numbers were small and they did not come into contact with the majority of Margariteños on a regular basis. The great majority of Margariteños in the pre-free port era were of a class rightly described as peasants, although in some cases the term post-peasant is probably more appropriate. The point is that nearly everyone was on the same social and economic plane, and so distinctions of social ranking were based on one's position in a kinship system.

Today however, the social milieu has changed dramatically and other elements of social rank, such as wealth, education and type of political power (often an outcome of the first two elements), have to be factored in when an islander tries to decide how much respect is due someone. The seeds of this change were noted by Orona (1968:75) in the 1960s in Punta de Piedras.

There is a discord between the values of the younger generation and those of the elder generation. A common cry of the elder generation is that the *respeto* is declining. There is less *respeto* in the family and less *respeto* among *compadres* .

I was told many times by Margariteños that the whole concept and practice of respect was in decline and disappearing. This was usually said along with a bemoaning of the way youth now behaved, with elders saying that the whole problem of increasing crime, drug abuse, prostitution and corruption was rooted in a lack of respect. Gladys Figueroa, of Punta de Piedras, was fond of saying, "Before, before the *puerto libre* , we could leave our house open at night and not worry if it would be there in the morning," (Field notes, 1992). This, she claimed, was because there was respect among families and neighbors. I was told repeatedly that in the time of Pérez Jimenez, the last dictator in Venezuela, there was no respect either, but that there was fear, fear of government or police

reprisal that kept people in line. In the days after the dictatorship, respect ruled, and kept society together and well-functioning. Now, in the 1990s, the common saying is, "no hay miedo ni respeto," "there is no fear and there is no respect."

Of course, in analyzing the practice of respect as a cultural form of ordering social relations and prohibiting inappropriate behaviors, one must ask the disturbing question (disturbing at least to the researcher) if there was really that much adherence to the standard of respect as people claim there was or if it was an ideal behavior but one not religiously practiced? Independent measures help only partially in answering the question.

One way of testing the popular perception that a lack of respect has led to an increase in crime is to look at reported crime rates over time. However, crime statistics for the island are unfortunately very sparse and suspect for the time period previous to the implementation of the free port. What exists are transcriptions of oral accounts, and these are subject to the rosy lens of time. What does seem clear is that the nature of crime has changed since the implementation of the free port, and that people perceive themselves and their property to be less secure today than twenty-five years ago. Before the free port, much of the reported crime was in the area of apprehending contraband. This was not considered criminal behavior by most of the Margariteños I interviewed, rather, it was considered gainful employment.

This point is central to the conclusions made by Bravo Dávila in his excellent study of crime on Isla Margarita from 1960-1986 (1993). Bravo Dávila shows how before the implementation of the free port regime, and afterwards, some types of crime were ignored locally, especially that of smuggling, which continued in a modified form after 1974. He says (1993:310, translated from Spanish):

...the Venezuelan state reprimands (controls) certain illegalities, practices a laissez-faire attitude in front of others, and participates shadily or openly in some specific variants, in function of economic interests and following certain patrons of a peculiar political culture, which themselves merit, of course, their own and miniscule analysis.

In general, because of the great increase in population, and because of the variety of backgrounds of the new immigrants that have migrated to the island, the cultural practice of social control through respect cannot reasonably be expected to continue as before. If respect is based on the family first and family ties second, these ties tend to be diluted by the strong immigrant flows into the island.

Compadrazgo

Entwined with the concept and practice of respect is that of the more widely known and practiced *compadrazgo*, known elsewhere in the literature as co-parenthood or godparenthood. It is the combined behaviors and expectations assigned to the *comadre* and *compadre* from a child's, the *aahijado/a* or godchild, Catholic rites of passage ¹. It is a fictive kinship relationship that has its basis in Catholicism (and in one case, Afro-Indian) belief systems. It is also a guide for secular behavior as well. *Compadrazgo* can be seen as another form of social control, as a means of extending the binds of respect that are strongest among immediate family members, to others in the community and sometimes beyond. In his study of Huaylas, Doughty (1968:119) defines *compadrazgo* thusly:

In its variant forms the system fulfills several functions. The most important is that of providing a means by which a sharing of wealth and responsibility is not only possible but obligatory. The

¹ As Orona (1968:103), the terms of address of *compadre/compay* and *comadre/comay* are also used to address good friends in a good-natured exchange, perhaps involving a small favor, such as, "Compadre, dame un cigarillo," "Compadre, give me a cigarette." Whether the use of the term obligates the addressed to comply with the favor or not I cannot be sure, but the response always seemed to be, "Sí, como no?" "Yes, why not?"

establishment of kin-type relationships between nonkinsmen accomplishes this and at the same time binds the members of the community closer together, creating avenues of communication in both a horizontal and vertical sense through the social system. The fact that the selection of *padrinos* is still a one-way street, in that the upper class does not choose its *padrinos* from the middle or lower class, affirms the presence of a class hierarchy.

But in the case of Isla Margarita, Orona (1968:103) says the ties are horizontal and vertical in relation to the generational structure of the community. The *compadres* are linked to their godchild and are linked also to the child's parents. In the 1960s ties of fictive kinship were also decided based on considerations of wealth and class. But the distinctions of wealth that existed for Margariteños before the free port were less noticeable in real terms than they are today. Not only was the upper class less numerous, but they were demographically more concentrated in the cities of Porlamar and La Asunción and so less likely to form ties outside of the community. Today the wealthier islanders are very often not Margariteños, nor even Venezuelans, and do not participate in any system of fictive kinship. The result of these changes has been a lessening of importance of the institution of *compadrazgo* particularly in the areas of the island most subjected to the changes engendered by the free port. In the smaller towns of Punta de Piedras, for example, the *compadrazgo* is still practiced, but its linkages are very circumscribed by the town's demographic limits.

When Orona wrote his ethnography of Punta de Piedras in 1968, he counted five basic forms of *compadrazgo*, those of *el agua* (the water), of the *bautismo* (the baptism), of the *confirmación* (confirmation), *del papel* (of paper), and *del matrimonio* (of the wedding). The fifth, *compadres del matrimonio*, I would imagine are close to what in the United States are known as best man and maid/matron of honor. Orona says this form was rarely used,

and I never saw it at all while on the island. In fact, by the early 1990s, there seemed to be only two forms of compadrazgo still recognized as viable, that of the *agua* and the *bautismo*.

Poniendo el agua , or the baptising of a baby with holy water, takes two forms, one informal and the formal. I theorize that the first form came about and is well-maintained in response to communities on the island having a shortage of priests, a lack of capital for all the trappings of a church baptism, and the belief that unbaptised babies, should they die, become *duendes* , or ghost children who do not rest. In order to face these problems, Margariteños developed the practice of home baptisms, done without a priest. They are almost a stopgap procedure to protect a child until a formal baptism in a church with a priest can be performed. This practice is also related to the Catholic sacrament of extreme unction, performed for those in danger of dying without the benefit of a priest. However, the "agua" is now a rite unto itself, as evidenced by its continual practice even though priests are available now at all times. Evidence of the rite's tenacity as a part of island culture was when in the 1960s, the priest of Punta de Piedras commanded the congregation to stop performing the ceremony. This command had only the effect of turning the community against the priest, and the Punta Piedreros continued *poniendo el agua* , as they do still today. However, as discussed below, the rite is losing currency among the "new" Margariteños, those who were not born on the island, or the more urbanized islanders.

The "agua" is a festive and informal affair. The parents of the child will, shortly before a baby is born or right afterwards, ask a male and a female to act as the *padrinos* of the baby. This request is considered an honor, not a burdensome obligation. Godparents in Margarita are not considered obligated to provide financial support for their godchildren, just to be emotionally supportive, and to

bring small gifts for the child on occasion. The padrinos may be a couple or may be completely unrelated to each other, perhaps even unknown to each other.

Plans are made for the day of the fiesta, usually held in the late afternoon or early evening. The godparents are responsible for getting the holy water with which to bless the baby, and the parents are responsible for providing the food and liquor for the party that follows the baptism. Depending on the parents' financial position, the refreshments range from inexpensive *crem  de menthe* liquor for the women to drink, and beer for the men along with saltine crackers spread with deviled ham from a can (a favorite treat for all Margarite os) for snacks to fine wine and scotch whiskey plus beer and the slaughtering of a goat for a feast.

Once the guests arrive, the baby is readied in its best clothing and brought out to some center area of the house. The *madrina* holds the baby, and the *padrino* holds the vial of holy water. In the case of my daughter, there was also the *madrina del platillo*, or the woman who holds the little plate to catch any drops of holy water, and the *padrino del brazo*, who helps where necessary, and who was also the fianc  of the *madrina del platillo*. Here the *madrina* and *padrino* were married and expecting their own child.

Showing how the practice is now losing currency with the younger generation of Margarite os, and is rarely practiced among those I call the "new Margarite os" (the *madrina del brazo* and the *padrino* were both from Caracas), the entire grouping had trouble remembering the words to say for the blessing, but finally got through. No one seemed upset or embarrassed by their faulty memory; what was important was the gathering, intention and act of blessing the child.

The entire ceremony took perhaps five minutes, and once over the guests promptly return to drinking, eating and if there is music, dancing. Sometimes popular card games are played, or dominos.

I would also add that while less so in Isla Margarita than in other cultures where the *compadrazgo* system is employed, such as México, the system also is a link between different socioeconomic classes. Orona also notes that the *compadres* of the *agua* and of the church baptism are held in equal esteem. However, Orona (1968:108) writes:

Social forces come into play in the selection of a *compadre*. The is especially seen among the *gente humilde* (poor people) who try to select someone who is socially higher than they for a *compadre* ...in this manner the *gente humilde* can attach their child to someone of a social and economic status higher than they in hopes of enabling the child to benefit from the economic help through the moral obligation of the *padrino*. ...the *compadrazgo* gives them an avenue of mobility. The more well-to-do people become morally bound to the poorer members of the society.

What has happened as an indirect result of the free port is that the larger and more diverse population, with its high percentage of immigrants, has diluted the institution of *compadrazgo*. Outsiders do not practice house baptism by holy water; children are baptised in church. But more importantly, as communities grow in population, there is less chance of becoming acquainted with members of different economic classes than oneself, and thus it is more difficult to extend the *compadrazgo* across socioeconomic classes. So the *compadrazgo* is losing its integrative function in the communities of Margarita, and the heterogeneity of the island's population is reinforced.

The Extended Family

The family as an institution is valued very highly among Margariteños, so much so that it approaches the sacred. If one insults your family, it is a grave affront. If one does harm to one family member, the entire family will be one's

enemy. The strength of these feelings and the depth of this loyalties often amazed me in their vehemence and sincerity. Even when there is disharmony among family members, if faced with an outside threat of some sort the family will at least put on a good face and try to give the appearance of being a solid unit. Because of this loyalty, most, but not all islanders live in an extended family situation, or live very close to the other members of the family. When a parent becomes old, widowed, or unable to care for oneself, they will move in with one of their children. If a child loses a spouse through death or divorce, they will often move home with their parents. Such behavior is seen as a duty, even when the extra family members pose an economic or emotional hardship.

Orona however, concludes that, "...no case can be made for any culturally influenced central tendencies or ideal family forms. Instead, family and household composition and residence reflect primarily accident and expediency," (1968:92). This is now more and more the case, where families on the island may not be located all in one town, or even on the same island. The economic opportunities in Porlamar and its environs has served as a powerful inducement for many Margariteños to leave the smaller towns and their families. Whereas the oil fields in the Maracaibo area were once a powerful draw for young men, the jobs and city life are now in Porlamar, and many young people head there.

Still, the family is still the primary fountain of values and beliefs imparted to children. While the television set teaches them about the modern world outside their *barrio*, their parents, aunts and uncles, padrinos and not least, their grandparents, will teach them about times past and what it means to be a Margariteño.

Now that a growing number of women on the island are employed outside of the house, it is often the grandparents who care for the children, and who teach the values of *la casa* and *la calle*. It is the way things were done

when they were young, and they see no reason to deviate from past practices. Furthermore, most young adults are inculcated with the belief and practice of *respeto* , or respect. This may change as families separate and women are more obligated to leave their children in state-subsidized daycare centers. One would predict then that this would be another force for the remaking of Margariteño ethos.

Male and Female Roles on Isla Margarita

Along with and enmeshed in the other social institutions and behaviors described above, there is the whole wide arena of gender-based behavior. This too is changing in response to the rapid growth of commercialism and tourism now sweeping the island.

Margariteños recognize two domains of gender-based behavior, the "street," or *calle* , which is male, and the "house," or *casa* , which is female. These domains exist in both a physical sense and as guidelines towards ideal behavior. While Orona briefly discusses these concepts and how they are practiced in every day life, I have seen little discussion elsewhere in the literature of similar domains. The exception is a study of a fishing community in Brazil carried out by Robben (1989).

The "street" is generally anywhere outside of the family home. Once a person steps out of their house, they are figuratively and physically *en la calle* , or in the street. Being in the street like this is to be in the public eye, and the distinction is one of public versus private behavior. Men are seen traditionally to have the privilege and right to lead their lives in the street, to be public figures, to have the eyes of the world upon them. To be a man is to be noticed, to cause some sort of sensation, be it good or bad. A man who does not live his life on the "street" is seen as effeminate, perhaps even homosexual (which is one of the worst insults to a heterosexual man's self-conception).

Much of what a man does in the "street," when not working, is to chum along with his friends, go to cockfights (almost exclusively a male domain, and hence very much in the "street"), visit *novias*, or girlfriends, and spend a lot of time going to bars, drinking on the street, or playing and singing music with his friends. A man goes home to sleep, to eat, and in between those two activities, to spend time with his family.

Women ideally do not spend a lot of time on the "street" for the home is their special arena. Here they tend to their children, cook, wash clothes, and gossip with friends who come to visit. The house itself is referred to as the woman's possession, whether it is truly or not (but in most cases the ownership of the house *is* in the woman's name). In Margarita the saying, "A man's home is his castle" must be modified to say, "A woman's home is *her* castle." Men are almost as visitors to each house, and the woman retains the last word in everything from the decoration of the rooms to how the family's income is spent.

Boys and girls growing up are taught early to learn their respective roles and the physical spaces each should occupy. Girls may play outside and in front of their house but they aren't to go hang around the street corners or the local bodega or ice factory. Those that do spend too much unsupervised time in the streets, especially girls reaching their teen years, are seen to be sexually loose and are referred to as "puticas" (little prostitutes). Boys, on the other hand, have free reign in going where they want.

There is one area that both boys and girls may go and that is to the beach. Most children growing up in communities that are situated seaside, and from when they can walk and be cared for by an older sibling, spend all their free hours on the beach and in the water. In larger seaside communities where economic stratification is reinforcing cultural differentiation, such as Punta de

Piedras, it is now mostly the children of the lower classes that spend time on the beach. Again, it the lower classes who that fish for a living.

The behaviors and symbolism of *calle* and *casa* are reinforced in most lower and middle class families through the structure of the extended family and, I believe, the *telenovela* . Because in many case the children may be cared for in the grandparents house after school, and because at that time of day there are broadcast telenovelas geared at school-age children, gender-bound behavior is easily learned. Girls are expected to stay within the house after school and not "hang around" outside in the street, but boys are encouraged to get out and get fresh air, etc. The traditional roles are so learnt.

But there is a growing inconsistency between what the culture used to prescribe and what is now economic necessity. Since the coming of the free port in the early 1970s and the more recent serious downturn in the national economy, women's and men's roles have been steadily changing and do not now perfectly mirror the cultural ideals of *casa* and *calle* . The two concepts remain ideals, but economic necessity has always forced a different reality into the daily lives of most middle and lower class Margariteños.

In a large number of historical accounts, visitors to Isla Margarita often marvel at the independence and hard-working character of the island's women. But it is because of the historical importance of fishing and out-migration as the island's main economic activities that women on the island gained such a reputation for independence and strength of character. The Margaritan woman was no shrinking violet. She could not afford to be. Men would often disappear to the oil fields in Maracaibo for months or years, sending occasional remittances, but otherwise relinquishing their active role in the household. Fishermen may have had times when they returned to the house every night,

but just as frequently would be at sea or on other islands for long stretches of time.

The absence of men has had a profound impact on male-female relationships and male and female self-conceptualization. While Margariteño men exhibit all the traits of what has now commonly come to be called *machismo*, there is a tempered quality to their machismo that I found hard to explain. And while women react to this machismo, they are quite unlikely to accept any description of themselves as inferior to men.

I could find no hint of admiration for the long-suffering female in Isla Margarita, such as one finds in, for example, México. Legendary women are fighters, they are tough and capable and able to deal with life on their own terms. The women of the recent past and present-day Isla Margarita also bear no resemblance to being weak and/or male-dependent.

Being female, I obviously spent much of my time on the island in the company of other women, both of my age and older. There was in general, regardless of social or economic class, a expressed sentiment that men are rather like large children, and should be treated accordingly. Yes, women would say, men are nice for sexual favors, but after that, a woman can't count on anyone more than on her female friends, relatives, and her children. Then they would recount how men are "dogs," because they will come only for sex and then leave and look for another woman. Yes, they would say, they may marry, and some make good husbands and are faithful and supportive. But the majority of men, most women believe, are unreliable and unredeemable. The best thing a woman can do is to set up her household and do the best she can to be prepared for whatever life may deal her.

I was often advised by older women that I should not even consider a man seriously until he had bought or built me a house. Then I could have the house, and if he left I would have something for my children and myself.

More educated women deviate from this attitude only slightly. They blame men's infidelities on the machismo of the culture, and hope that through education the situation between men and women might change. The remainder of the women of Margarita believe that men are as they are--unfaithful, great drinkers, often undependable--because it is in their "nature" as men. So instead of trying to teach their own sons to have more responsibilities in their relationships with women, they do nothing because they believe there is nothing to be done.

Cook (1992) uses the term *low male salience* to describe one of variables leading to a complex of female aggressiveness and a cross-sex identity complex among males. However, in this case the concept of low male salience is more helpful in explaining why the women of Margarita have been and continue to be those in charge of the household, both economically and philosophically. Also by using this concept as an analytical tool, I can describe better the past and present paradigm of male-female relationships that define the nature of the core of Margaritan social life, the family.

Low male salience is "characterized by male absence, unavailability, and low male reliability," which encompass the three distinct forms of Margaritan male behavior (Cook 1992:157). The first of these is the historical pattern of male out-migration. Until the boom of international tourism, a common part of a man's life was to migrate out of the island in search of work, most often in the oil fields of Maracaibo (see both the sections entitled "A Hundred Years or So of Solitude" and below, "Immigration and the Oil Fields"). Some men left to work and then returned with saved capital and perhaps began to fish or open a small

family business. Others settled in Maracaibo, or Caracas, or Punto Fijo, started another family, and were rarely heard from again.

Both Cook (1992) and Orona (1968) note that the nature of fishing in Margarita also demands that the men are away from home for an extended period of time. Quoting from Orona (1968:94),

...with respect to the work organization of fishermen, the men work in groups on the *rancherías*. They maintain close communication with the house but they are for the most part away from it. They come home on the weekends, the interims between *temporadas* (seasons), or when someone has died in town. When the fisherman is at home, he may go out to visit, play dominos or repair the fishing equipment. If the men work on a *ranchería* that is located on Margarita near the town then they come home at night. But the general pattern is to maintain the *ranchería* on Cubagua and come to Margarita to fish only because of inclement weather. Because of the partial absence of the man, the house is managed entirely by the woman (Orona 1968:94).

Therefore, whether due to migration or more local work patterns, the day-to-day physical presence of a man in the house was not a common occurrence until the late 1970s.

The second behavioural pattern characterizing males is that of polygyny, which is related to the local practice of *concubinato*, or a couple living together, with or without children, without being married by either the Catholic church or a civil authority. Jesus Manuel Subero (1988) traces the roots of this practice back to the 1500s, being practiced by Spaniards with the local female Guayqueri. Orona found that:

Matrimony is not frequent in Punta de Piedras...[and] the majority of people marry after their children are born...when one is in danger of death the priest is called to perform the marriage ceremony. This is called "Matrimonio In Articulo Mortis," (1969:51-52).

During my fieldwork I questioned elders as to why so few marriages were performed thirty to fifty years ago. Their answer was always the same: marriage was a luxury, and few could afford to pay the priest, or buy the rings, the new clothes, and the obligatory party afterwards, replete with food and beer and whiskey. This continues to be the case today, and many couples will live together, letting their children serve as the tie that binds them.²

Men were and are expected also to marry or to at least live in concubinage and have a large family. Men were ideally virile, fertile and expected to have not only a wife but a mistress or two in another town. One elderly man I knew had his primary legal wife who was "*la señora*" and then had families with at least three other women on the island. All of the women were aware of the others, and while not pleased, did nothing to change their relationship with him. After this man died, his various children came regularly to visit his legal wife, and she received them all graciously. Another man, who had died just before I arrived in Margarita, had recognized 28 children as his own. Those who knew him joked that that number was really only about half of what he was really responsible for fathering.

The practice of a man maintaining more than one household may have been reinforced by the simple facts of male-female ratios. Alexander (1958:142) notes that:

The off-island movement of men has increased greatly in the last few years as a result of the demand for labor in the oil fields and in government construction. As a result there is a great preponderance of women over men. In 1941 there were 1,000 women to each 780 men, as against the national average of 1,000 women to 990 men ... The ratio becomes even

² All the weddings I witnessed or read about in the newspaper were considerable affairs that must have cost considerable amounts of money. And more and more islanders are getting married only *por civil* or in a civil ceremony, and skipping the church wedding. This seems to be a reflection of the realization that divorce is a more common event, and the church does not allow the dissolution of a marriage.

higher in the 20-49 age group where it was 1,000 to 580 men in 1936 and 1,000 to 560 in 1941.

It would then not be hard to understand that men were a scarcity, and as in other cultures around the world, forms of polygyny are often practiced where men are in high demand and short supply. Rather than be completely "manless" a woman would accept a part-time relationship and tolerate the inconveniences.

However, the result of such male promiscuity is that there was and is a high percentage of single mothers or *madres solteras*. This comes first from the cultural belief in *machismo*, which carries with it the myth of constant male virility. Combined with the illegality of abortion in Venezuela, the high value awarded children, and the low usage of birth control, single young women with children are so common as to be taken for granted. No matter where I went on the island, there was a single mother, sometimes in her own house but often living in the household of her mother. The mothers usually claimed to have their boyfriends, who were the fathers of their children, but did not live with the woman. The typical pattern was for the man to visit on the weekends, bringing small gifts or money, and sometimes taking the family on an outing. The rest of the week the man would either be living at his parents or with his primary wife and her children. With little or no help from the male, many women who have children have had to fend for themselves economically.

Regardless, there is little to no stigma attached to being a single mother in Isla Margarita. When Vice President Dan Quayle made his stinging remarks about the undesirability of a popular U.S. sitcom glorifying single motherhood, most islanders were left cold and were forever asking me why the vice president would say such things. To them, to be a mother is one of life's most beautiful and rewarding activities. It does not matter if the woman is married or not. She

is still a mother, and closer then to their deep belief in the Virgin Mary and what they see as the true calling of women.

The last characteristic describing low male salience is what Cook calls "male transience" or the instability of sexual unions. This has been discussed above and warrants little further attentions other than to note that men still expect to be "allowed" extramarital affairs, whereas the woman is not. The reality is somewhat different.

The men I knew the best were mostly from Punta de Piedras and Porlamar. As I sit here at the computer, I cannot recall one married man who had not had at least one affair outside of his primary union. From fishermen to school teachers to military men to politicians, all had another lover on the side, and often an entire second family that the man maintained. In the great majority of the instances the wife was aware of the infidelity but felt powerless to do anything, especially if she had much at stake in the marriage. If she left or asked for a divorce, she would lose her economic support, and perhaps a respectable place in the community as the Señora of Don Fulano. The most common reaction of women was to rant and rave for a few days, then calm down. Sometimes the man would hang around the house more, being repentant. Sometimes he would just take off to his lover's house, claiming his wife's behavior was driving him away. Until women achieve social and economic independence in Venezuela, there will be no exit for women from this emotional quagmire.

Boys were usually expected to follow in their father's line of work, be it fishing, farming, smuggling or immigration to other parts of Venezuela. Many young boys were expected to begin helping their senior male family members with their work by the time they are seven or eight years old. They would accompany them on fishing trips or help in the *conucos*. Sometimes, if the

family could afford to lose the child's labor, the child would attend school with the hope of continuing on to a teaching college, a vocational program or the university. This latter event was the most highly valued, but the hardest to obtain for various reasons: lack of role models who had gone on to further education, a high general rate of illiteracy, and the need to have each family member contributing something to the slim livelihood of the household..

Margariteño men are also expected to be strong, both physically and emotionally. However, as Kim Cook notes (1992), men are also allowed their weaknesses which are usually expressed in a well-defined manner. For example, there is no shame for men to cry for the loss of a close family member, or for the breakup of a marriage or courtship. Others, in the majority women, will comfort them, or as Cook notes, tolerate them if they have chosen to drink to *matar el dolor* (kill the pain).

I had gone to the field with the general hypothesis, drawn from other studies of modernization's effect on women's roles, that since the formation of the free port and later the development of mass tourism, that the roles of women had somehow changed considerably. I also imagined that somehow, although going against the grain of much of the literature, that women's quality of life had improved. After spending nearly three years in Margarita I have concluded that women's lives are better than before in some very material ways, but in some ways are worse. This will be further explained in the following chapter on the changing traditional economies of the island.

CHAPTER 8

CHANGE IN THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMIES OF ISLA MARGARITA

Introduction

When the idea of creating a freeport in Isla Margarita was again bantered around in the 1950s and early 1960s, the desired effect of the proposed change was to be a revitalization of the island's economic system. The economy needed to be changed because the island was "backward and developmentally depressed," (APROMAR 1988:1). The report by APROMAR goes on to say that the state of Nueva Esparta had one of the lowest Gross Territorial Product outputs in the country and that "the high level of unemployment and underemployment accentuated the familial disintegration brought on by migrations to other parts of the country," (1988:1). The planned revitalization would come through increasing support of tourism as a source of income, and the tourism would be cultured on top of the supposedly rich substrate of the freeport.

Over and over again, in political and journalistic accounts, the creation of a freeport in Isla Margarita is seen as the most important and necessary step to take in order to arrive at a tourism-driven economy. Tourism was seen as the perfect solution to all the island's problems. All the classic pro-tourism arguments were repeated: tourism is clean, tourism can be implemented with lower capital investments, it would not clash with the existing island economies, and it would give immediate return. There was also an element of competition evident in the arguments. It was believed that the rest of the Caribbean islands were after the tourism pie of the 1950s and 1960s and unless

Venezuelan politicians woke up and legislated into existence the freeport, Venezuela would lose hope of ever receiving even a miniscule piece of the pie.

Particularly among the members of the *Cámara de Comerciantes e Industriales de Margarita*, year after year, the freeport was touted as being able to stem the flow of money out of Venezuela because now the tourists would be drawn to spending their money in the stores of Margarita, and not in Curaçao or Aruba (Miami was still not an economic threat) (Wanderlinder 1987:145). Simply stated, the freeport was to be the attraction, the hook that would draw visitors to the island. Once there, they would spend money not only in stores, but in restaurants, hotels, taxis, nightclubs, and all other connected businesses. The freeport, in a sense, was the engine, and tourists were the gasoline. Unfortunately, no one thought of how to build the rest of car.

The broad plan was to create various fountains of employment to attack the persistent high rates of of unemployment and underemployment found on the island. Creating new jobs would solve so many attendant issues of the underdeveloped economy. One of the main economic "problems" to be solved by the freeport and its associated tourism was the entrenched practice of smuggling. "Entrenched" because smuggling had been—an continues to be—an option for subsistence and profit since the Spanish had settled on Cubagua. The smuggling of pearls and slaves stand out as early examples, but by the 1950s, the illegal merchandise was comprised mainly of cigarettes, liquor, imported cloth, automobile parts, small appliances, and assorted other luxury goods (Salazar, Hernandez 1992). Those who owned businesses in the towns were both losing profits to the smugglers, who sold direct, and were forced to pay higher prices for what goods they did obtain for

retailing. Thus one finds the business community, primarily of Porlamar, spearheading the move to create a freeport in Isla Margarita.

Not only would the freeport serve as the springboard for national and international tourism development on the island, but it was hoped that large manufacturing firms from the United States and Europe would also build factories, or at least assembly plants in Isla Margarita. Some grandiose schemes quoted sources that predicted that the United States was just waiting for the word and they would move 50% of their assembly and manufacturing of light products to the island. Others predicted that the Japanese were bringing some 300 "floating fish factories" to both exploit the island's rich fishing grounds and then set up fish processing/packing plants on the island. None of this ever happened, even on a small scale, and the idea of promoting the island as a potential site of light industry gradually faded.

Mining was given some thought, but nothing came of this either. The island was too small, and resources not rich enough to make the exploitation of mineral resources profitable in the short or longterm.

There were also plans to have Isla Margarita serve as a grand stopover for cruise ships that ply the Caribbean. This was tied to the idea of tourism again. The idea of building a jetty large enough to handle the oceanliners that navigate the Caribbean Sea was still being debated when I was last on the island in 1994. As noted elsewhere, there is now talk by the current (1996--1999) governor, "Fucho" Tovar, to build just such a complex to welcome and treat cruise ships in the town of Punta de Piedras.

The changes in the economy to be brought by the freeport were to be vast and fantastic. The simpleness of the scheme was deceptive: by simply changing the laws of imports and exports on the island, all the economic hardship experienced by Margariteños would disappear, if not immediately,

then eventually. As I have claimed all along, this has not been the case, and today the island, with the national economy in tatters, is facing hard decisions about how to face the future.

The following sections will look at how the implementation of the freeport and linked tourism have impacted and/or fundamentally changed the traditional economies operating on the island until the mid-1970s. These are artesanal fishing, agriculture, craftworks, smuggling, remittances from off-island employment, the new informal economy, and paid labor performed primarily by women.

Fishing

Out of all the ways to make a living on Isla Margarita, fishing has been seen as defining the island both in its culture, folklore such as poetry and music, and its economy. While the practices of agriculture and craftwork have a long history and also played important roles, fishing is the essence of the island, both to outsiders and insiders, especially in the twentieth century. In 1989, explaining to other Venezuelans that I wanted to study fishermen, the advice was always that I must go to Isla Margarita if I wanted to understand fishing. Fernando Cervignon, writing the Prologue to Gonzalez Cabellos study of fishing in 1990, comments:

...to marginalize fishing in Margarita, is simply to finish off with that which certainly has been the most attractive and singular cultural characteristic of the island. A Margarita that stops being of the fishing, simply stops being Margarita, and becomes just another island of the Caribbean standard of vacuous and stereotypic tourism.

Fishing can be divided into three basically different sectors, artesanal fishing, known on the island as *la pesca artesanal*, high seas fishing, or *pesca*

de altura , and the shrimping industry, also known as *pesca de arrastre* . The first and the only one to concern this study, is artesanal fishing. It is small scale and the most prevalent on the island. The high seas fishing is practiced in larger wooden boats (six to twenty meters in length overall). These boats go on extended trips fishing for snapper and grouper, and will not concern us much here ¹. I will not discuss the shrimping industry either, as it is not based on the island, and the industry's impact on the fishing in Isla Margarita is limited to their conflicts with artesanal fishermen over access to fishing grounds.

Artesanal fishing, also sometimes called coastal fishing (*la pesca costanera*) because it is carried out in the waters close to the island, is practiced in *peñeros* , or open, wooden skiffs which vary in length from four to six meters. These are equipped with outboard motors of 20 to 75 or sometimes 100 horsepower. Motors have been in use since about 1940 (previously, canoes were imported from the Orinoco Basin, and were rowed), but sailpower was common until the 1960s ². Normally three men are in the boat, although with some types of fishing, such as that practiced in La Galera, two can accomplish the job. Larger skiffs, called *lanchas* , usually require five men per boat.

The variety in fishing technology is not great, and most fishermen use some form of long nets that are either set to drift or that encircle their prey. The fish are either gathered into the boat or else driven towards shore

¹ These are the boats that are most often used for smuggling drugs today. Shrimpers are also sometimes used, but are more watched for breaking laws concerning shrimping, and so are more risky propositions for smugglers.

² The introduction of motors seems to have occurred with little subsequent disruption of the fishing force. This is only my guess based on interviews with older fishermen. It would be difficult to ascertain any changes now as records addressing artesanal fishing for this period are almost nonexistent.

where they are plucked from the water by hand or small nets. Of course each type of net is somewhat more specialized than described here, and has been refined over many many years to target the desired species of fish ³. Along with net fishing, there are also those who fish exclusively with fishtraps, and those fishermen who still dive for pearls when the pearls are not under a ban. Usually the fishtrap fishermen are those who also collect pearls and other mollusks. For the reader who wants a more detailed account of technology and work structure of artisanal fishing, please see Appendix 3.

The fishing communities of the island are scattered from one end to the other. According to Gonzalez's 1990 survey, there were some 29 stable fishing communities and 20 *rancherías* on Isla Margarita, Cubagau and Coche. Appendix 3 lists these communities and *rancherías* according to their location on Margarita.

Some communities are now embedded in an urban tradition, such as the pueblo of Bella Vista in Porlamar. One day early in my fieldwork I was walking along, looking at the tourists on the beach and the highrise hotels, and all of a sudden I was in the midst of a fishing village. The shift from "dental floss" bikinis to old sun-withered men repairing their nets was quite stunning. The construction and sprawl of the freeport and its linked tourism has enveloped the fishing village here, but it has not extinguished it. The same case can be found in Pampatar and Juan Griego. I predict that the eastern and northeastern coastal fishing communities of Manzanillo, El Tirano, Guayacán, will be the next towns to be enmeshed in the urban sprawl. This is a trend occurring primarily in the eastern section of Isla Margarita,

³ If any fisherman ever reads this, or has this read to him, I will be in trouble for such simplification. But the fact is that the primary technologies employed to fish in principle and results vary little. It is when one looks at the secondary technologies, such as the fish traps or *atarrayas*, that more variety comes to play.

including the area known as La Isleta; those communities west of the airport and San Juan are still too far removed and marginalized from the intense development to face any competition for natural resources soon. However, the peninsula of Macanao may be any area to watch, as plans were being debated as to whether to develop some large resorts there.

Other fishing communities retain their small town feel, such as La Galera, Punta de Piedras, or Boca del Río. In these areas fishing is clearly the dominant economy and there is little competition for resources from new developments. Gonzalez (1990:7) also delineates two other types of fishing communities, those of the temporary *ranchería*, a fishing camp, which is occupied only seasonally, and those of the permanent *ranchería*, such as the small settlements of El Tunal or La Pared.

Fishing is by all means a group effort, from manning the peñeros and nets to driving the fish to shore. Because of this structure, it supports and reinforces kinship relations and fictive kin ties, such the system of *compadrazgo* discussed in the previous chapter on the household. Typically, wherever a boat comes to land its catch, there will be family and kin members there willing to help out in return for a small part of the catch. Boys, sent by their mothers to help the men a little, know that a fat mackerel will be the payment. Old men and women hover around the catch, calling softly to the fishermen to remind him of their presence. The fisherman will then survey what he has available, usually choosing fish from those not to be sold in the market, and fill the other person's plastic bag. All of this goes on with very little verbal communication, and even lacks in "thank-yous" ⁴ or "you're

⁴ In general, Margariteños are not known for being "gracious." Whenever I, without thinking - reflecting my own cultural upbringing - would say "gracias" people looked at me strangely. I was told repeatedly that there was no need to thank that which is done as a responsibility or out of respect to the other. The thanks are understood, the behavior expected as the only decent way to be. See Chapter Seven on the cultural role of *respeto*.

welcome." When the catch has been taken directly to a packing house, the fishermen still take out their shares for their own families. They will take more than what is needed for their own household. Then when the women are out back of the house cleaning the catch, other women of the community will stop by to chat, but their true purpose in coming is to obtain their *parte*.

I must take this opportunity to digress a bit from the main topic. The practice of sharing in Isla Margarita is prominent in the traditional households and communities. One learns the practice as a toddler and carries it to one's grave. One is expected to share share share everything, especially if one is sharing with a close family member or kin relation (and in past times, this included almost everyone in the village). But by far, most of what is shared is food and drink. A child does not eat a whole ice cream cone by herself, but splits it with her cousin. When one drinks coffee, water, rum, anything, it is considered very rude to drink the whole cup by oneself. The proper form is to drink half of the cup's contents and then offer it to another person. For example, while sitting with Hilaria on the stoop of her house in La Galera, La Negra would come out every afternoon with a cup of coffee. Hilaria would sip down half the cup and give the remainder to me. Or I would drink first and give the remainder to her. This occurs regularly even with the littlest tidbit of food; no matter what the person has, she will break it up and share it with the others.

Why is this behavior so significant? I believe it is an adaptation to the never-ending days of uncertainty of the food supply, due to drought or poor fishing catches. Sharing one's food ensured that everyone at least got something, and that the next time, whoever did the sharing today would be the receiver tomorrow. It also served to vary the diet, which has always been,

especially among the poor, heavily dependent on fish and *arepa* . Those in possession of fresh fruit or vegetable could always be counted on to share their "bounty." The behavior continues today even though such shortages are rare, as a way to bond kinship ties closer. And in poorer communities it assures, in a country that does not have a welfare system, that the poor or the elderly do not go hungry.

Women participate in the fishing in various ways. Some women actually go fishing with their husbands. However, they will not be a part of the casting and setting up of the net as is done off the coast of Punta de Piedras, but will join the boats the next day when the fishermen begin to corral the schools of fish toward the shore and ultimate capture. Women have always helped in pulling the nets to shore, as documented by Orona (1968) and others. Many single women with families to support depended on this type of labor to obtain fish for her family. Pilfering of fish was and is common in these cases, but it is accepted and ignored by the fishermen, as they know that the woman needs the fish to eat.

The women of La Galera were also known to fish, and many of the older women told me of how they would often go out with their husbands to help with the drift nets. However, when I went fishing, the younger women expressed amazement that I could do so and not become seasick. That women do not fish more offshore was not due so much to the belief that women are incapable of fishing, or that it is tabu, but that women think they will become sick at sea.

Women also use the smaller handheld castnets (called an *atarraya*) to fish for mullet in the flats around Juan Griego and other areas such as Chacachacare. In La Guardia they will catch small shrimp, cook them and sell them bundled in plastic bags to tourists on the road to Juan Griego.

Shellfish gathering is mostly a female occupation, as is the marketing of the product. Be it clams, mussels, or oysters, the women clean and cook them and then sell them on the streets of Porlamar. Women are supposed to go to La Asunción to get a license to sell shellfish, but many do not. During the times of the cholera epidemic, many women were rounded up and warned to get a health permit. Sometimes the employees from the Ministerio of Agriculture and Livestock (MAC) would help the women by piling them into the packs of pick-up trucks and taking them on the long ride to La Asunción, wait for them to get their license and then take them back to Porlamar.

One other area of production by women deserves brief mention, that of the productio of sea urchins, usually sold as a smoked delicacy. This is practiced by some of the women of Chacachare, and the amoung earned is fairly high.

In the past, the commercialization of the catch is recounted by Alexander (1958:159):

Fresh fish caught commercially are both sold locally and exported to the mainland. Local fishmongers meet the boats and disperse the catch througout the island. A large part of the catch, and particularly the *carite* and *pargo* , is iced and shipped to Puerto la Cruz and and La Guaira. The ice boats make regular rounds to the fishing communities or *rancherías* where they buy the morning's catch. Not infrequently when the master of the ice boat wants a load of carite or pargo, he will sail out to meet the fishermen, and the purchase and loading is carried out at sea.

Ten years later, Orona (1968) described the marketing process in much the same way, except that one other element was introduced, the *camionero* , or small truck vendor who buys fish directly from the fishermen and then sells it in the inland villages of the island. The only open-air market until

the freeport in the 1970s, was located on the waterfront of Porlamar, and here the local fishermen might unload and sell their catch directly to the public (later the new market at Conejeros, outside of Porlamar, was constructed). At this time, women still played a large role in the marketing of fish in the inland villages, and were famous for their long walks to the coast to get the fish, and then carry them back to the villages in large woven baskets upon their heads. This practice has now almost completely disappeared, and only a few old women in Porlamar and Juan Griego work as fish vendors on the streets.

In the past there was also a heavy reliance on salted fish. With ice very hard to come by, fish was preserved by salting and then sold both locally and distributed throughout the mainland. Salted fish is still preferred by many islanders, but is becoming harder to obtain, as most fish is now sold fresh for higher prices. In some cases, people in Porlamar are beginning to see salt fish as a rare delicacy, and its price has risen considerably in the past few years.

The marketing of fish is now a bit more complex process. The elements in this process are the fishermen, the packing houses, the ice houses, the *caveros*, or fish trucks, the camioneros, the hotels and restaurants of the eastern shore, and the local population.

We have discussed the fishermen, so I will turn to the others in turn and give a brief description of the role each plays. The packing houses, as I call them, exist in every community where there is a substantial population of fishermen or landings. These packing houses are not where fish, such as sardines, is canned or otherwise prepared and sold later. The common packing house is a simple structure along the waterfront where fishermen can sell and unload their catch. The fish is then rapidly iced, packed into fish boxes, loaded into trucks and carted off to either the large market in Puerto La

Cruz or driven directly to the markets in Caracas. If sold in Puerto La Cruz, the fish is transferred to other trucks who take it back to the larger cities of the interior. The owners of these packing houses are referred discretely to as the *caciques* of the town, or the men who have money and power.

The ice houses are not as common as the packing houses. They supply the much needed ice used in packing the fish. If they decide to raise prices of ice, a crisis of prices is set off among all the links in the chain of fish marketing.

The *caveros* are either independent entities or are linked to fishing parties or to the packing houses. Usually a packing house will have one to two trucks to go to far off beaches where fishermen offer land their catches. They are usually in the best position to bargain for fish as they have cash on hand and can pay the fishermen immediately. Again, the vast majority of fish obtained by these *caveros* is sent off the island to larger markets.

The independent *caveros* operate at a disadvantage in front of the *caveros* from the packing houses. They rarely can pay for the product up front, and must have the trust of the fishermen in order to get the product on credit. The independents try to make up for this disadvantage by offering the fishermen a higher price than the other *caveros*, but this cuts into the independent's profits. The independents usually take the fish to the local markets in Porlamar, where they sell to vendors who have stalls.

The fishermen know that in a situation like this, especially when there has been little fish available (due to recent holidays or inclement weather) they are in a sellers market, and they make the most of it. These are tense moments on the beach, with each buyer pacing back and forth, shouting new offers as they pull their hair. The fisherman, the "boss" enjoys these moments, and some are great actors. He will procrastinate, change his mind,

walk off to drink some rum, all in hopes of getting an even better price for his product. I have never seen a fisherman lose when the stakes were set this way.

The camioneros are less in number than the caveros, and can carry far less fish than the larger trucks. They are sold to by the fishermen almost as an afterthought, and are the least respected and poorest of the fish distributors. The camioneros sell their fish directly to the public by driving up and down the streets of inland towns and villages. They may also sell to smaller restaurants that are geared to the locals, not the tourist trade.

It is important to understand that all buying and selling and prices is based on what species of fish is landed. The most desired species for export, outside of sardines, are king mackerel, yellow jack, and *coro coro*, a large species of grunt that is highly prized by islanders and mainlanders alike. Species of less value are various types of snapper and some small grouper, and then assorted tropical ocean fish. I never noticed islanders refusing to eat any species of fish, only to have a higher preference for one over the other.

In general, the mackerel and jack are sold to the packing houses and the caveros and shipped off-island. Very little enters the local market directly. If hotels and restaurants want such fish, they will buy it from the packing houses at a higher price. However, the tourist-oriented businesses that cater to Europeans and North Americans are mostly interested in buying larger groupers and snappers from the high seas fishermen, as these are the species sought after by their clients. The bycatch from the large catch of mackerel, for example, is usually sold to the camioneros to be sold to the locals. As odd as it may seem, it was not uncommon to experience fish shortages on Isla Margarita. This would happen after a decline in fishing activity. The first fish to then be landed was bought up by the packing houses and taken off-

island. This would leave the locals with practically nothing, unless one had kin ties to fishermen. It common many times through the year to walk among the fish stalls in Los Conejeros and see empty or nearly empty stalls.

Finally, there is the question of demand created among the hotels and restaurants of the eastern shore. While there is a demand for fresh fish, it has not been sufficient to even approach sustaining the fishing industry of the Isla Margarita. For example, the restaurants and hotels of La Galera and Playa Caribe bought their fish locally, either direct from the boats or from the local packing houses. But as tourism fluctuates with the season, hotels and restuarants are not to counted on by fishermen as a regular source of income.

Problems in the Fishery and the Impact of the Freeport

Isla de Margarita has a tradition of being an island of fishermen since precolonial times. Fishing seems to be the one constant on an island teeming with changes. It is also the economic sphere that has been least impacted by the introduction of the freeport and tourism, either in a positive or negative way. I had arrived on the island expecting to find that fishermen were experiencing a rapid demise of their livelihood, but I was proved wrong. There are problems of competition of common resources between fishermen and tourists, and there are the generalized problems that tourism's development has generated, such as the enormous stresses that the growth this sectors places upon services such as water, sewage and electricity. But these latter problems impact all who live on the island, not only the fishing communities. In general, fishing, unlike the other traditional economic activities on Isla Margarita, has maintained its integrity and independence in the face of the blatant commercialism of the freeport and its spin-off of mass tourism.

Fishing has actually benefitted the tourism industry by acting as a cultural attraction. This has also helped the fishing industry to win certain battles with developers. Although another anthropologist claimed that the popularization and quaint characterization of fishermen "was sickening," I found it to be the industry's saving grace at times. I agree with Cervignon that fishing is an attraction to the island, and to do away with it would negatively impact on the tourism industry.

The biggest threats to artisanal fishing in Isla Margarita are competition for natural resources and the neglect of fishing by government officials who focus almost exclusively on developing tourism.

The problem of competition can be illustrated by briefly reviewing one incident that occurred during my time on the island. The first is the case of El Morro. El Morro is a beach located on the northern part of Porlamar. It has, for centuries, been used by fishermen as a landing spot for immense catches of sardines and second, of jack and mackerel. The waters there are protected by natural outcroppings, and a small reef runs a bit offshore. It is one of the most productive fishing grounds on the island.

There has also existed, since before the coming of the freeport in the 1970s, the desire to build a docking terminal to service large cruise ships. These boats would bring hundreds of new shoppers to the stores and restaurants of Porlamar, and put Isla Margarita more on the map of desirable tourist destinations in the Caribbean. However, for one reason or another, this dock has never been built yet, although each local government has always come into power promising to do something about the "cruise ship problem."

Finally in 1992, the local government, in conjunction with the island's tourism interests, decided to construct a large dock at El Morro. This they

began doing without much announcement, and one day there were bulldozers, dump trucks and dragging boats beginning to fill the little bay in preparation for a dock. The newspapers got ahold of the story, and all hell broke loose. The government claimed that this was the only appropriate and logical site for a cruise ship facility, and that such a facility was an absolute necessity for the continued development of the island. The fishermen who used the area were appalled and outraged that this most productive fishing ground was to be destroyed without so much as a second thought for them or their role in the island's economy. I interviewed some of the fishermen there at this time, and all stressed that until this time they had rather liked all the tourism development, and the tourists. But the case of the dock was too much to bear and they would fight back.

Fight back they did. They enlisted all possible sources of moral and intellectual support. Marine biologists spoke on the side of the fishermen, as did the island's cultural historians. The press took the side of the fishermen, and the story went national, causing journalists in Caracas to cast aspersions at the local government. The national senate also took up debate on the matter.

The government and tourism interests shot back, calling the other side traitors to the progress of the island and the nation. One politician is quoted as saying (El Sol de Margarita, May 20, 1992:3):

...from the point of view of the fishing industry, it could be a point of great importance, but I ask myself, is this really the only place to fish in Margarita, and between the possible importance of this area as a fishing zone and the pier as a tourism activity, which one of the two has priority in giving the best return to the state? You have to choose...

But no choice has yet been made. When I left the island in 1994, the situation was still at a standstill, or a standoff. Construction of the dock had

been suspended pending further studies. Fishing was still continuing as before. It seems the issue will rest for awhile, and may have to rest indefinitely. The majority of funds for the construction of the site were to come from the federal government. At the current moment, this government has cut back on or cut out every non-essential expenditure. It is hard to imagine that a cruise ship dock would be a priority in the national budget.

The other threat to fishing that can be linked to the freeport and tourism development is that of benign neglect of the industry by the government. Politicians rarely see the traditional economies of the island as being profitable or as being able to further their political aims. The only time one sees government representatives in the fishing villages is at election time, when they will parade through the streets and make speeches full of promises. I cannot recall how often the fishermen of Macanao were promised running water and better docks and unloading facilities by local politicians. These are promises only, and nothing has ever come of them. All political energy and dedication goes to the freeport and the more lucrative tourist developments. My belief is that with the political system in Venezuela and Isla Margarita being so corrupt, the politicians see little gain to be had in fishing. On the other hand, there are many more opportunities for skimming profits from the businesses on the eastern shore. Politicians will pay attention to fishermen only when their own public image is at stake.

Before closing this section, I would like to note the following: although the artesanal fishing of Isla Margarita (and the rest of the country for that matter) is often referred to as technologically backward, in 1989, the most recent year statistics were available, the island's fishermen landed 12.17 % of

the total national catch (Gonzalez 1990:2) ⁵. This is done in a manner that marine biologists are now calling "sustainable." It is true that the form of fishing employed by Margariteños does not take a heavy toll on the environment, or cause a depletion of the fish stocks. Therefore, the general consensus among fishery experts is to discourage trying to industrialize, or "modernize" the nation's fishing fleet by using more efficient technology. Rather, they emphasize careful expansion of the fleet through better access to credit and easier payment plans. This would free up fishermen to sell their product locally if they choose, and would lessen the inhibiting ties so many fishermen have to the packing houses.

Agriculture

The following description of agricultural practices before the early 1970s has been drawn almost exclusively from Alexander's 1958 geographical study of Isla Margarita and my own fieldwork. Other sources will be cited when appropriate.

There was always difficulty on Isla Margarita in growing crops and anything but a household subsistence basis. The soils are just not that rich, and the limited rainfall severely restricts the quantity of production. Furthermore, there was not a great natural availability of arable land. Irrigation has never been much of an option, as what water that was had was used more to satisfy primary consumption of the household ⁶. However, such a hostile environment has not completely stopped the islander who

⁵ Overall in the country, artesanal fishermen are responsible for 60% of the total landings.

⁶ There was a new irrigation project being tested on the island when I was there. It was using recaptured water (runoff) from households in order to irrigate some small farming plots in the northeast of the island. The last I read of the project, managers were optimistic for its success.

wishes to cultivate a product for home use, or to sell a little surplus in the market.

As was discussed in Chapter Five, Margariteños have a liking for growing things, and try to have at least a kitchen garden or fruit trees if at all possible. Now that the economy is sufficiently based on the freeport/tourism, such small gardens are common but not entirely necessary. In the past however, before transportation networks had improved much, small-scale agriculture was the only way for islanders to fulfill many of their dietary requirements. It is noteworthy that because of the rapidly rising prices of food due to the devaluation of the bolívar, many families are finding it again necessary to rely on some home cultivation.

In the past the most important crops were yuca, both sweet and bitter (*Manihot utilissima*), sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*), maize (*Zea mays*), beans (*Phaseolus* and *Vigna* sp.), plantains, and bananas (*Musa* sp.). Their importance continues into the present. These and other native plants were grown in what is called *aconuco*, which is almost a generic term that refers to shifting and permanent fields, as well as larger kitchen gardens of the present. Alexander cites the term *labranza* (1958:144) to denote lowland fields that were permanently worked. He also notes that kitchen gardens were then called *solares*, but I rarely heard this term used. Traditionally, men worked the fields and women were responsible for the household garden, a tradition that continues today, although I noticed quite a few men always out putting in the backyard garden.

The traditional form of cultivation is swidden agriculture. The lowland permanent fields are simply cleared of excess vegetation and then planted. Farming implements usually consist of simply a machete, digging stick, and handheld hoe. No record of the use of oxen or other beasts has

been found, and more recently, the use of a tractor is rare to nonexistent due to lack of capital and the configuration of the fields. In the hillside plots, the farmer will clear the vegetation, let it dry, and then burn it. Plots are rotated about every two to three years.

Alexander notes that although difficult to assess, 70 to 75% of those practicing agriculture owned at least a part of what land they planted. He also mentions the large holdings by single families where the crops of sugar cane, coconuts and dates are grown. These are primarily cash crops exported from the island while the others are mostly products grown for consumption on the island. Table 8.1 shows how the land distribution has broken down from before the freeport to when the general economy was booming. I would hypothesize that when new figures become available, there will be a marked decrease in the area of available cultivatable land due to the greater numbers of Margariteños selling parcels of land to the Europeans moving in and building up on the northeast coast.

Table 8.1 Agricultural Activity by Number of Units and Area, 1961--1985

<u>Years</u>	<u>Units Farmed</u>	<u>Area in Hectares</u>
1961	2,563	24,531
1971	1,274	9,906
1985	1529	2,392

OCEI, Censo Agrícola de Isla Margarita, 1985, cited in FEDECAMARAS, 1991:19

Table 8.2 Crops Cultivated, By Type and Area (Hectares ²), 1961--1985 *

<u>Crop</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1985</u>
Maize	1,562	341	240
Red Beans	7	0	1
Black Beans	410	60	26
Tomatoes	22	7	20
Ocumo	2	0	1
Yuca	0	28	76
Sugarcane	0	41	18

Crop	1961	1971	1985
Tobacco	12	1	1
Avocado	4,956	1,504	1,499
Cacao	1,263	4	100
Coffee	531	700	1,005
Banana	25,880	27,987	19,783
Coconut	75,573	21,978	15,600
Papaya	6,583	455	4,346
Mango	26,763	10,568	18,749
Orange	9,061	1,553	2,882
Pineapple	101,911	23,700	5,348
Plantain	18,503	43,107	15,119
TOTALS	273,039	132,038	84,816

OCEI, Censo Agrícola de Isla Margarita, 1985, cited in FEDECAMARAS, 1991:20

* Crops in grown in areas of one hectare or less have been left out of the table but not the total calculations.

Further underscoring the decline in island agriculture are the figures given in Table 8.2, where in 1961 about one third of the island was under cultivation, but by 1985, that percentage drops to a little less than ten percent. To complete the picture of how the freeport and the context of a booming national economy fueling itself on petroleum led to the practical disappearance of a rural economy on Isla Margarita, I turn to the figures on livestock kept, presented in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3 Livestock Kept, By Kind and Numbers, 1961–1985

	1961	1971	1985
Cattle	3,620	3,025	993
Burros	3,325	1,607	1,225
Goats	8,153	8,539	3,145
Sheep	57	637	396
Poultry	2,373	22,407	146,301
Horses	2,164	427	5

OCEI, Censo Agrícola de Isla Margarita, 1985, cited in FEDECAMARAS, 1991:21

A few things should be noted about the figures in Table 8.3: First, the number of horses on the island in the 1990s has increased so much that they

are now considered a nuisance in the city of Porlamar. The increase coincides with a newly imported equine sport, a sort of rodeo, that is popular in the Llanos region of Venezuela. The increased migration to the island in the past two decades has brought, obviously, not only people, but their pastimes as well.

Second, the number of poultry kept can be attributed both to the growing population and increased demand for chicken as protein due to the drop in availability of fresh and salted fish. Also, raising poultry is one of the easier ways a woman can increase her household income without having to sell her labor in the freeport stores, leaving her free to care for her children at home. All of the chickens raised on the island are cared for by women on a small scale at their homes.

Third, the question of goats must be addressed. Goats are part of traditional Margariteño culture and have served to provide milk, meat and leather for crafts. In 1950, there were 43,476 goats on the island. In the late 1950s, the government set about to destroy a great percentage of the goat population, claiming that they were responsible for increased erosion due to overgrazing. Today, goat meat is still highly valued and for special occasions, such as a wedding or baptism, a goat or two or three, must be slaughtered in order for the celebration to be considered a proper one.

Finally, I do not think that there are more than one hundred burros left on the entire island. While burros served as a beast of burden (and were an important part of the island folklore) for many years before the freeport, the use of the automobile and truck have made these animals obsolete.

Cottage Industries

Before the introduction of the freeport, the "health" of the cottage industries of crafts such as hammock-making, pottery, shoemaking, etc. was

not extraordinarily good, and much of the production was carried out to provide for barter with other island producers, exchanging products for fish or crops. Some of the craft products was sent off the island, but it has been widely noted, even by the author, that the quality of the goods was not such that it was in great demand. The craft production was primarily done out of necessity, and to create simply for the artistry of the act does not seem to have played a large role.

It was not until the beginning of the freeport that craftspeople began to think seriously again about craft production for value, not for personal or on-island use. Unfortunately, this shift in direction of crafting has not supported by the owners of the stores in the freeport. The most current information on numbers, locations and types of crafts produced on Isla Margarita is shown in Table 8.4.

FONDENE, in the same study, notes that 61.5% of those involved in artisanry are female, of which 44% are single, and 91% of all craftspeople are native Margariteños. Almost half (43%) have not completed the first six years of schooling. As a group, no one mentioned have any technical assistance from the state or private sources, and 94% claimed not to have received any financial support either. Ninety-four percent were not affiliated with any guild or associations, and 64% claimed to not know if any such groups existed. Clearly this is a marginalized group of workers, and the freeport has apparently served to augment that isolation.

Table 8.4 Total Number of Artesans in Isla Margarita, Distributed by Municipality and Activities, 1988

Municipality	Total	HM	CR	CS	OR	TP	ZP	TL	DV	TC	IN	CA	AD
Arismendi	69	6	0	9	1	8	0	3	31	3	0	7	1
Díaz	506	1	1	48	3	28	6	1	51	348	0	19	0
Gomez	168	29	36	34	0	0	53	4	6	0	0	0	6
Maneiro	59	0	0	0	0	48	0	1	4	0	2	6	0
Marcano	73	2	2	0	1	0	37	17	0	11	0	5	0
Mariño	34	0	0	4	13	0	0	0	4	7	0	0	6
Tubores	151	2	0	0	0	68	4	3	7	40	0	24	3
Macanao	135	0	1	0	0	75	0	2	17	6	1	27	6
Totals	1195	40	38	96	17	262	80	14	131	404	3	88	22

KEY: HM = hammocks, CR = Ceramics, CS = Woven Goods, OR = gold/silverwork, TP = Fish Nets, ZP = Shoes, DV = Sweets, TC = Lacework, AD = seashell work, IN = leatherwork, CA = Carpentry, various, and TL = woodworking

From FONDENE, 1989.

When the freeport was first introduced it was written into law that every store operating as a duty-free entity had the obligation to carry products of traditional Margariteño origin. The specific law is contained in the Reglamento del Puerto Libre de Margarita, created through Decree No. 5, on November 5, 1974. It reads (translation is the author's), "the establishments that function under the regime of the freeport, are obligated to acquire and market the craft products of the nation," (cited in FONDENE 1989:88). This decree was enacted in hopes of trying to assure an increased source of income for these marginalized household industries. However, this law has been and is in the most part completely ignored by storekeepers; a store that sells only fine French perfumes is not likely to have an area dedicated to selling homemade candies or handwoven shoes.

Cited in Aristimuño et al. (1980:69), the potter, Orsini Rodríguez of El Cercado, close to Porlamar, says this of the impact of the freeport on his craftsmanship:

Okay, after the making of the zona franca and free port, this [activity] declined, because in the old days, before the zona franca, here in El Cercado, there was about 40 person involved in pottery production, working with raw clay...then this went into decline, for the following reason: the tourist didn't come to this to see [our work], but instead to buy clothes...the freeport is a disaster for me as an artesano, I thought the stores were going to contribute to the development of the island and of crafts, because they are held to having five percent of their merchandise of Margaritan crafts, but well, I will have to look for work elsewhere...

According to Abreu (1984:94), there are five main factors that have lead to the decline in crafts production in island communities:

1. The coming of the freeport made commerce the first and most important activity on the island. Concomitantly, there was a change in the perceived value of goods, with imported products becoming more desirable than locally produced goods.
2. There was a growing scarcity of the materials (palms and certain other trees) necessary to produce the crafts. This is even more true ten years later when the building boom has taken away large tracts of once open land.
3. There has been a loss of cultural identity in those things considered essentially Margariteño. This is accompanied by a lack of desire to pass on specifically islander cultural knowledge.
4. There has been considerable pressure from the market and government to commercialize the production process by taking it out of the household to areas capable of mass production.
5. An almost complete lack of promotion of these products to the tourists who visit the island.

But my fieldwork in the 1990s seems to indicate that not all has been lost, and with the shift of the economy's emphasis on tourism, there may be hope of rescuing some of the crafts still found on the island. The main crafts,

orarteriania , still practiced today on Isla Margarita, are: 1) pottery, in El Cercado and Tacarigua; 2) hammocks, also in Tacarigua; 3) *alpargatas* , an island type of espadrilles, made in El Maco, Caserio El Bolívar: and , 4) the sweet candy made from papaya, piñonate, made in Fuentedueño. All of these, particularly pottery and hammocks appear to have experienced a resurgence in popularity among visitors to the island, and the villages that sell the goods often sell direct to tourists in rental cars. I noted more emphasis made in tourist information packages to mention the towns famous for craftwork and to encourage the tourist to visit and buy the products for sale.

Smuggling of Contraband

Smuggling contraband as a form of economic survival has a long history in Isla Margarita. Subero (1986:36) notes that "Margariteños are very inclined towards navigate, searching the sea for their means of subsistence that the earth has refused them, and so are smugglers by trade, fishermen by necessity and cosairs in temperment..." Even some governors, both colonial and later, have been accused of participating in this illegal art.

The act of smuggling is one that is fondly recalled by almost all Margariteños I spoke with during my fieldwork. The attitude was that "those were the good old days, hard but good." Smuggling was a well-respected way to make a living in the times before the freeport, and some men became rich in doing so. One informant combined smuggling with fishing at first, and then combined it with inter-island trade between Los Roques and Isla Margarita. With his profits he opened a store in Punta de Piedras, a bar outside of town, and started up a natural gas business that is one of the largest on the island today. His business provided and provides for his large family,

and earned him respect and well-being. Some were not so adept, and today are left as very resource-poor fishermen, but rich in good stories to tell.

One of the prime reasons the freeport was introduced was to put an end once and for all to this form of economic activity, but its success in abolishing smuggling is only superficial. One lucrative exception to the success is the smuggling of illegal drugs, primarily cocaine and to a lesser degree, marijuana. With United States pressure put on Colombia to slow its export of cocaine, the smugglers in recent years have looked to Venezuela as an alternate and less checked route of export to the United States and other destinations. For obvious reasons, I could not gather a lot of hard data on this activity except for hearsay, gossip and newspaper reports when large quantities of drugs were interdicted. It does appear that some of this trade is carried on by fishermen who work in the larger offshore fishing boats and so have the ability to travel greater distances, such as to other Caribbean islands like Martinique. This was admitted to me by one owner of such boats. He claimed that the bad economy of Venezuela, and the inability to get dollars, has forced him to consider other merchandise than fish. When asked if perhaps he ever transported drugs, he shrugged his shoulders and asked what else he could do in such times.

In his 1993 book, Cambio Social, Criminalidad y Control del Crimen en Margarita, Bravo Dávila documents how the freeport has just made it easier in many cases for the smuggling of the past to continue but under somewhat different guises. One example given is what occurred in 1985, when the prices of imported goods went disproportionately high. Islanders could not afford to buy the products they were used to, such as certain brands of cigarettes, scotch, and comestibles. This opened the way, temporarily at least, for the

contrabandistas to again have a hand in supplying the islanders with what was desired at a price they could afford (Bravo Dávila 1993:293).

Another way of defining current cases of smuggling is what is known as *contrabando de extracción*, or literally, extraction contraband. This is when large quantities of items imported are then smuggled out of the island to the mainland to be sold in retail stores or directly to friends and family. There are limits as to how much of certain goods can be taken out of the island, such as 12 pairs of women's underwear, or two kilos of butter. But I remember the night of February 27, 1992, when I was at a friend's house in the town of Los Robles, outside of Porlamar. One woman lived in Caracas and had bought huge quantities of t-shirts, men's and women's underwear, children's clothing and small purses and wallets. When I arrived she and another friend were busy taking the items out of their wrapping and repacking them, willy-nilly, into canvas duffel bags. The woman was taking all this back to Caracas to sell to friends at a lower price than the items could be bought for in standard retail stores, but at enough of a profit for the woman to risk the smuggling. "What will you say if the customs questions you," asked my friend. "Oh, I will just smile and say, "You know how women are...they must always have many changes of fresh clothes!" and if they still press, well, I can always pay them something..."

This type of smuggling seems small-time enough to not threaten the integrity of retail businesses on the mainland. However, in the time I was in Venezuela, there was a continuous heated exchange between politicians and different commercial sectors about whether or not to close down aspects of the freeport, or to close it entirely, due to the large quantities of goods entering the island without paying taxes, only to appear in other cities,

threatening the viability of legal commerce. This point is explored further in the section below entitled "The Informal Economy."

Dávila continues with this point by linking it to the overwhelming presence of corruption in all aspects of daily life in Venezuela. The paying off of officials to turn the other cheek is commonplace, as are almost all other forms imaginable corruption. A recent case in 1994 shows how things have gotten very out of hand. A traffic court judge in Caracas had the reputation of taking bribes in order to forgive judgements, or not convict offenders. But each type of offense to be pardoned had its special price, and the judge would threaten police trouble if the offender did not pay. A sting operation was set up, and the judge was confronted one afternoon in her apartment. When she realized who was at the door, she took larger sums of paper money and began to toss it from the windows. The poor people on the street below could not believe their luck, and scrambled to retrieve the floating bills, setting off scuffles in their eagerness. This was apparently all captured on TV, and was the subject of unending jokes and spoofs for weeks afterward. The list of cases of corruption, from the street corners in La Galera where a fisherman is cheated out of his rightful earnings from fishing, to the impeachment of the president, Carlos Andres Pérez in 1993 for misuse of public funds, is endless.

The evidence of the corrupt use of funds is clearly evident in high Ciriliocles in Isla Margarita. Charges of corruption color the local elections, temper the protests, and permeate the mentality of the Margariteño. Nothing gets done without paying someone a little extra, or claiming kinship links to extract a favor. This subject could easily be the entire focus of this study, but it is not. I will return to the problems caused by rampant corruption in the last chapter.

The Informal Economy

The burgeoning informal sector of the Venezuelan economy is a recent phenomena which has been called a threat to legitimate businesses, not only in Porlamar but across the country, and particularly in Caracas where clashes between the formal and the informal have more than once become violent.

The informal economy has been variously analyzed and scrutinized by numerous others. For the purposes of this work, I follow Oliver-Smith (1990) to define the informal economy of existing in Isla Margarita as existing outside the realm of State control. For example, a woman selling empanadas everyday on the same street corner from the same stand could be said to not be a part of the informal economy because she is liscensed by the Ministry of Health, and therefore part of her income goes to State treasuries. She is counted in employment polls.

Mostly, my definition is aimed at the group of opportunistic entrepreneurs who work when they have something to sell, or when the seasonal tourist temporadas begin and then they find something to sell. This definition then covers the children selling empanadas from styrofoam containers at frequent street festivals, or hawking shell necklaces to tourists on the beach at La Restinga. It covers the door-to-door salesman of good luck charms and potions, and the barber who also goes door-to-door to cut hair. It also covers the many women who come to Isla Margarita to buy hundred of pairs of underwear at low prices, and then smuggle them back into Caracas to sell to family and friends. All of these people are not employed in these pursuits on a regular basis, but some of them do have a set place from which they operate their business, and not one is sanctioned by any government office. For more on the characteristics of the informal sector, see Smith (1990).

The informal economy of Isla Margarita, primarily centered in Juan Griego and Porlamar, is a direct consequence of the coming of the freeport and tourism to the island. It is an example of opportunistic behavior and also a sign of the ill state of health of the general economy of the country. One could actually say that much of what made Porlamar a successful freeport was the proliferation of the the informal economy. Not having the infrastructural configuration to support all the shoppers that come to buy goods, the informal economists cater to the needs of the public. This is especially true of the food vendors. But if you look at any of the varied economic exploits of so many Margariteños over the past 25 years, one can note that much of it was sporadic petty capitalism. For example, someone would get a good price on a truckload of ceramic floor tiles or a shipment of airconditioning units. This person would then "buy cheap, sell dear," and make a nice profit to be used elsewhere. It is a sort of free wheeling and dealing atmosphere that pervades the economy that pervades the island.

Secondly, the freeport is a mecca to those on the economic margins of society. As prices shoot up due to current inflation levels, which in 1994 were at about 60--100% per month, and as the labor market shrinks or becomes more specialized, more islanders must find some means of securing or augmenting their livelihood. Having the government try to reign in or abolish such activity without offering other avenues of earning income will only further economically and socially marginalize the informal economists.

Those involved in this sprawl of the informal economy are often recent migrants who have come to the island from the coast's poorer regions or are only in Margarita to sell their goods, being itinerant vendors (locally known as *buhoneros*). They hold occupations that cover a broad spectrum of

possibilities, from the woman who occasionally buys *piñonate* ⁷ in Fuentidueño and sells it then in Juan Griego, to unlicensed hot dog and empanada (deep-fried meat, cheese or fish filled corn flour turnovers) vendors, women, men and children who sell underwear, belts, and rubber shoes on the sidewalks of Porlamar, to the still existing "hippies" (often themselves "permanent" tourist from Europe) who peddle handmade jewelry and handicrafts from Orinoco-basin Indians.

Participants in the informal sector may be found almost anywhere on the island, from the tourist beaches to street corners in tiny villages, from the international airport to the ferry docks. Still, the most intense activity of the informal economy occurs in Porlamar, heart of the free port. Here the sidewalks teem with vendors from early morning to early evening, their bulk often forcing the pedestrians and shoppers into sharing the streets with the jumbled and belligerent traffic of motorscooters and automobiles. The products sold are of general poor quality. The most common items noted were truckloads of imitation designer blue jeans, women and children's underwear, and t-shirt galore. There are also vendors of cheaply made plastic shoes, hair ornaments, perfumes, sunglasses, socks, and of course, those who sell re-recorded cassette tapes, usually announcing their wares by having it blared at top volume from a small "miniteca," or powerful tape player.

It is from Porlamar that spring the complaints and actions against the informal economy. The owners of the duty-free "formalized" shops of Porlamar perceive the informalists as a threat to their livelihood. They claim that the buhoneros block their doorways, dirty their sidewalks, and steal their

⁷ A sweet indigenous to Isla Margarita, made by the women of the valley of San Juan de Bautista, in the pueblo of Fuentidueño. It is prepared from green papaya and unrefined locally-produced cane sugar.

business away. Shop-owners say that they pay taxes and pay for city services and so their businesses should be protected from this unregulated activity.

During fieldwork from 1992 to 1993, actions against street vendors, commonly known as *buhoneros* , were documented through observation and the use of local press coverage. At the very end of June, 1993, the regional government offices of the Civil Police, Malaria Control, and the Ministry of Health determined that the street vendors were not complying with health standards and the majority were operating without valid permits. Basing their actions on the campaign to prevent the spread of cholera, all unlicensed (including some who had licenses) were forced off the streets, leaving Porlamar quite desolate. These "street-cleaning" actions happened about two to three times per year during the three years I resided on the island. A mandate would be handed down from the Ministry of Health, claiming unsanitary conditions among the food vendors and dangerous crowding of the streets by all the other *buhoneros*. The civil police were given orders to remove any vendor without an up-to-date operating permit. A few days of a grace period would pass to give the vendors a chance to collect their goods, or finish selling them off. Then, poof! One day I would arrive in Porlamar and the streets would be empty. Without the street vendors, there were few shoppers to be seen, no one munching hamburgers or drinking cokes on the corners, no one coming from Las Mercedes or Tacarigua to buy inexpensive underwear for their children. Porlamar would have a desolate and sad feeling to it.

But then, after about a week, the vendors started coming back, a few here and there. Some never left, taking a chance mostly a night, to sell their wares, and just quickly moving on when the police came near. Within two

weeks after the "street sweeping" all the vendors were back in full force, and the whole cycle would begin again.

I do not believe that the problem of buhoneros can ever be solved in a satisfactory way in the near future. If one considers the current precarious state of the economy in Venezuela, including the lack of jobs and the dearth of well-paying jobs, one quickly realizes that participation in the informal economy is a necessity for most of those involved. It is opportunistic behavior by the individual enacted in response to the uncertainty of everyday life.

Immigration

According to Suarez and Torrealba, the most significant demographic phenomenon in Latin America has been the incredible rate of urban growth due to internal migration to the cities (1979:291). In this, Venezuela has been no exception. The shift from rural to urban residence is seen in the fact that in 1936 the population was 34.7% urban; in 1961 the figure is 67.5% and in 1971, 77% (Suarez and Torrealaba 1979:292). This shift is attributed to the changes in the economic structures of the country, from coffee to cacao production and then to petroleum exporting. It is the end of the agrarian phase and the shift to an industrial export economy that one sees a jump in internal migratory flows.

Since the 1800s, a trend towards out-migration, particularly of young men, looking for work in other areas in Venezuela, has existed in Isla Margarita. The popular saying, "There are Margariteños everywhere," implies not that there were so many Margariteños everywhere, but rather that even in the most forsaken place in the world, there would be at least one

Margariteño ⁸. Table 8.5 shows the net migratory flows that have relative to the state of Nueva Esparta between 1926 to 1971, the year the freeport was instituted.

Table 8.5 Net Migratory Flows for Nueva Esparta, 1926-1971

Years	Positive Flow	Percent	Negative Flow	Percent
1926-1936	0	0	7,397	4.35
1936-1941	0	0	14,781	11.74
1941-1950	0	0	6,045	3.36
1950-1961	0	0	8,967	4.23
1961-1971	2,110	0.40	0	0

From Suarez and Torrealba, 1979.

While the authors do not mention it as a cause for increased internal migration during the 1936-1941 time period, the great jump in the numbers of those leaving the island during those years must have not only been conditioned by the boom in oil production but also by the state of the world economy. This is the period of the Great Depression, and certainly the negative economic impacts must have been felt on Isla Margarita as well. What must have already been a precarious existence would have worsened, and the only hope many men had was to leave in search of some source of employment.

The cause for such high numbers of Margariteño immigrants was essentially economic: there was not enough work on the island to support any growing population. Even if one could fish or farm, there was always the temptation to leave, earn a great windfall, and then return to the island to build a new house, or perhaps start one's own business. It was not so much that one was starving on the island, but rather that the possibility of economic betterment was seen to not exist on Isla Margarita.

⁸ There is even mention by Subero of Margariteños being contracted to dive for pearls "off the coast of Arabia," (1986:32).

Another occurrence that sometimes forced migration were periods of extreme drought such as that which occurred in 1925 (Estava 1975:13):

The island in this epoch was plunged into one of the longest and most anguished droughts ever registered in its history. The misery parched the entire city, the fields wilted and toasted by the inclemency of the sun...there was no work for anyone. Hunger, the inseparable companion, knocked down the doors of the humble houses. The children of this beloved land had to migrate in search of sustenance for them and their families...so was the forced and painful exodus of the island's children.

In 1961, according to census reports, 37.2 percent of men born on Isla Margarita were found residing elsewhere in Venezuela (Ministerio de Obras Publicas 1966: 13). Table 8.6 shows the distribution of islanders by state. While the largest number of immigrants were found in the state of Anzoategui, and to a lesser degree in Sucre, primarily working in agriculture, most people's memories are from their migrations to the capital of Caracas and the oil fields of Maracaibo. This is most likely due to the common perception that the coastal states are just extensions of Margarita, or that Isla Margarita is an extension of the coastal culture. It is part of the *Oriente*, the eastern part of Venezuela, and the people of this entire region feel a particular affinity for each other. Caracas and Maracaibo were seen as more exotic destinations.

Table 8.6 Distribution of Margariteño Immigrants, by State, in 1958

Zulia (Maracaibo)	5,305
Federal District (Caracas)	8,138
Carabobo	1235
Anzoategui	10,065
Sucre	7,056
Delta Amacuro	1807

Source: Ministerio de Obras Publicas, 1966, p.14.

Almost every Margariteño I spoke with had at least one familial connection to either Maracaibo or Caracas, or both. Some had apartments in Caracas that they rented out or left to relatives, others had their fathers living still in Maracaibo, or sons and daughters studying there.

This occurrence of out-migration also had some affect on bringing in new ideas to the island, and actually helping in the acceptance of the freeport and international and national tourism. Returning immigrants, because they had lived in the larger cities of Maracaibo and Caracas, would be more receptive to change, more open to the possibilities presented with the changing economy of the island. They were in a sense change agents and cultural brokers for those islanders who had remained at home and still had very parochial views of the outside world. There came to the island not only returning Margariteños, but those not born on the island, and those not even born in Venezuela. They too helped convert the island into a cosmopolitan outpost in the Caribbean.

With the implementation of the regime of the freeport, the trend was reversed and the island went from being an exporter of people to one of the country's greatest "pulls" in the flux of internal migrations. By 1990, almost a quarter of all those living on the island were from other regions in Venezuela. Another four percent of the resident population was born outside of Venezuela, although this figure seems low to me because of the many Middle Easterners and mainland Chinese who are now shop-owners in Porlamar. These figures also do not include illegal immigrants to Venezuela, or Isla Margarita. The general consensus is that the "illegals" are predominantly from Colombia, but I believe that this perception is colored by the current animosity many Venezuelans feel for Colombia.

In summary, the recent high numbers of immigrants to Isla Margarita have posed and continue to be a great challenge for the island to absorb, even minimally. The growth of squatter settlements (ranchos), an increase in the number of unemployed, and the general stress put on public works such as water supply and sewage treatment has lowered the quality of life for all.

Women's Work

With the opening of the freeport's numerous commercial enterprises both in Juan Griego and the larger city of Porlamar (although it must be remembered that all the island was declared a free port), younger women were suddenly offered more of a choice in the area they wished to be employed. While some Margaritan historians (Subero, Felix Gomez) romanticize the Margariteña woman of the past, giving the impression that the Margariteña never sold her labor but only did it for love, in truth she was just as often working outside the home as she was within. The most traditional patterns of paid labor were in cottage industries: making and selling *empanadas* and *arepas*, peddling fresh fish from the beach or carrying it on top of her head to the small interior island villages, gathering and selling native species of shellfish (and even in some cases from La Galera, fishing from shore with seine nets) having a sewing machine and working as a seamstress, selling other home-made food products, or practicing one of the many island crafts that in 1992 were almost extinct. While the women interviewed recalled fondly their labors, they were carried out to make ends meet while their male companions were away at fishing camps or in the oil fields weeks and sometimes months.

One of the best compliments to pay a Margariteña woman is to call her *guapa*. This word usually has the connotation of being pretty or good-

looking, or perhaps brave. But on the island, a woman is guapa when she is tough and hard-working, carrying on a difficult life while not complaining and keeping a smile on her face. A woman is guapa when she is healthy and robust, a good child-bearer, and a good household economist ⁹. Women usually had no choice about being guapa. With their men usually away from the house for long periods, either having migrated or off fishing, women were forced to earn money to buy the necessities for her family.

There were limited ways a woman could earn a living, and most were restricted by the area in which a woman lived. A woman might employ herself in a cottage industry such as a potter if she lived inland in El Cercado or Tacarigua, or concoct candies (*dulces*) of mango or papaya if she had her home in Fuentidueño. If she lived along the northeastern coast, her family might cultivate corn or pineapple, and she could then sell these in the market of Porlamar. If she was from a fishing village, she could pack fresh fish into a basket to be carried on her head, and set off inland to peddle or barter her goods.

Another common way for women to earn money was to make and sell the popular *empanadas*, little meat, fish or cheese-filled and deep-fried pies. This occupation could be carried out anywhere on the island, both in the small villages or in the urban centers of Porlamar and Juan Griego. It required little capital to start a business, one could choose one's own hours, and the women could bring their young children with them to work. Most women went into business with their daughters, sisters or cousins. Two women could make more empanadas in less time, and two women could

⁹ Men are not usually referred to as guapo in the same sense as women. To call a man guapo is to call him handsome, and sometimes the word is used jokingly to imply effeminacy, i.e., possessing homosexual tendencies.

care for children more easily than one. Almost every woman over forty years of age that I interviewed had at one time been self-employed by selling empanadas.

Other women would work as maids in the house of the well-to-do of Porlamar. Others might take in sewing or washing to augment the family's income. Those lucky enough to have finished school could work as teachers in the local schoolhouses. Many women worked as petty capitalists, amassing small quantities of trinkets and goods (and sometimes contraband) and selling them regularly in the marketplaces.

Regardless of what they did, the fact is that women of the island worked and earned an income, thus making them somewhat economically independent of their spouses. There is then a long tradition of women working for a wage outside or inside the home in Margarita, raising chickens for market or standing on a street corner and hawking fried sharkmeat pies.

But with the freeport a whole new type of employment opportunity appeared, especially if one was seen as young and attractive: she could be a shop clerk. Women would become the main source of cheap labor to staff the new stores and in other ways, attend the relative hordes of tourists coming to descend upon the island (see Chapter Four). But this new form of labor was distinct from the previous forms in some very important ways: 1) it took away women's independence as owner of her own labor, and 2) it took women into the realm of *la calle* in a way that hawking empanadas never could—it sexually integrated the workforce, and not with other Margaritan men, as women having a stall in the market could expect, but with outsiders, primarily immigrants from the Middle Eastern countries of Lebanon, Syria and the disputed Palestine. This impact on male–female relations was still being felt in 1994.

Thus women were more independent *before* the freeport because they owned their own labor and they were seen as, if not equal to men, then fitting counterparts. But with the freeport women became subsumed to the new form of capitalism in a double way: they had to sell their labor to others, and those who were their bosses were men who did not share the same cultural perspective. In the case of Middle Eastern capitalists, one could make a case that such men have very different cultural ideas about the role of women in day to day life, and that women who are not from their culture deserve less respect. Not that this could be generalized, but that it must have occurred enough to have caused the creation of a folk mythology among the majority of Margaritans with whom I spoke. This view is crystalized in the words of Angel Felix Gomez, one of the island's recognized historians. Angel, during a long drive about the area of Juan Griego, told me, "...another development [due to the opening of the freeport] was the diminishing of the belief and practice of women belonging to *la casa*. The result was what I call "clandestine prostitution." Women abandoned both *la casa* and in many cases, their studies, to work in the new stores of the Puerto Libre in 1975. They were attracted to the opportunity to dress well, eat in restaurants with men, go dancing. It wasn't true prostitution, but figurative," (Gomez 1992).

Now the situation is different. Young women are both affected by feminist arguments for independence of the ideal and traditional path of marriage and a family, and also beset by economic worries. Both of these factors have resulted in women being drawn into the work force in greater numbers than ever before.

In La Galera, the picture is one of 44% of all women over the age of fifteen years being somehow employed and earning an income. In many cases it may be simply the selling of empanadas or *refrescos*, soft drinks, or it

may be a fulltime position as a maid in one of the tourist hotels. There were only 9 women out of the 53 employed, or 17%, who worked in positions that required some specialized schooling, such as a being a teacher or secretary. All the rest were employed in either low-end service sector positions, or worked in the informal economy of the island.

The age structure is also a clue to what women are doing when they are earning a living. Of those 66 women aged fifteen to 30 years of age, only 25, or 38% were working. This is a reflection of two somewhat contradictory cultural beliefs: 1) that women still are expected to marry fairly young and finish childbearing by their late 20s to early 30s and, 2) women are staying in school for a longer period of time than before. Eleven of the 66 females in this group (17%) are still in school. This is notable in that most lower-income girls drop out of school after finishing their first six years, which are mandatory for all children in Venezuela. The next cut-off for quitting one's studies is at about age 15, when one decides what one will study and if one will continue on to the university.

The highest employment rate is among those women aged 31 to 50 years. Fifty-eight percent, or 23 of 40 women are working in some way. Most of these women have completed their child-bearing and their children are in school, leaving them more free time to pursue employment.

All of the employed women over the age of 51 years own their own businesses, two being bar owners, one owning a *bodega*, and the other two selling snacks and soft drinks. All businesses are located at the same place that the women live. Some of these women had their husbands help them put up the capital for their business (a bar owner and owner of the *bodega*) and the others simply saved up money from previously held jobs.

In my innumerable conversations with middle-aged and older women in La Galera, mostly on the stoop in front of the houses, sharing coffee or crab legs or even sometimes whiskey and cigarettes, they all expressed wishes to have enough money someday to just be able to sit and relax. That was there dream, and when one would say it, which seemed frequently, all would voice their agreement. No children or men to bother them, no job to take their time. They felt that they had worked enough in their lifetimes that they deserved a rest.

Finally, there is also a new avenue of employment that has opened up to younger (presumably) women on the island, particularly those living in or close to Porlamar. This is the job of prostitute, or escort. The phenomenon of sex tourism arises wherever there are tourists, and may be simple, as in cases of local young men acting the role of "exotic lover" for visiting foreign women, as in Luperon in the Dominican Republic or in Isla Mujeres, México (Freitag 1993; Kitner 1986) Sex tourism may also become fully institutionalized, as has happened in Thailand (Phongpaichit 1982) and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

In reviewing publications by the Asian Women's Association (1980) and the International Feminist Network (1979), Graburn (1983) recounts the reasons for women entering into prostitution in tourism-based economies. First, there is the over-arching patricarchal view of women as either "madonna" or "whore." Second, in many traditional societies, Isla Margarita included, women who have violated customary sexual behavior oftentimes find the avenues to marriage and/or a career effectively blocked.

I conducted an informal survey of young Margariteña women in 1992, asking them what they would do if they were raped. The most common response I received was that they would rather their rapist killed them than

to have to live with such shame. There is still the strongly held belief that women somehow "ask for" rape and to be its victim is extremely embarrassing. Women said that they would also try to hide the rape from others. This contributes to under-reporting of rapes in Venezuela (and one assumes much of Latin America where the same cultural notions hold sway). The point is, an event such as rape may make the victim feel as if she has no choice but to turn to an occupation such as prostitution.

Third, due to the economic "crisis" in the rural areas of many, if not most, developing countries, many young women, unskilled in their labor, are emigrating to the urban areas in search of work. When they can not find the jobs they hoped for, they often turn to prostitution, many times feeling they must somehow support their families still in the countryside. Even in post-revolution Cuba, there is an attempt at promoting tourism on a limited scale. Darling (1995) writes about the *jineteras*, as the Havana prostitutes are known, as women so economically "tapped out" that prostitution seems the only solution to leading a better life.

Graburn concludes this discussion by linking the rise of sex tourism to the boom in capitalist profits in the "centers," Europe, Japan, and the United States. He also questions the oft-mentioned saying, Tourism is Prostitution, in that countries or communities are seen to sell themselves literally to the tourists that flock to visit.

In Isla Margarita, the local newspaper's classified ads, just in the later part of 1992, began to advertise opportunities for "young women, of good 'presentation,' for entertainment jobs, no experience necessary, ability to speak second language a plus." The flip side of these advertisements were other advertisements geared towards the consumer, offering "beautiful, (French, English or German-speaking) educated young women, willing to

satisfy your every desire." Advertisements offered "your place or ours" (one business offered special yacht trips) and payment was easily made by credit card. Such advertisements were reinforced by special tourism-dedicated issues that were spattered with photographs of clearly local, nude women frolicking on the beaches. The captions were almost humorous, such as "With sights like these, no wonder Margarita is such a famous tourist destination!"

In other words, sex tourism is taking hold fast in Isla Margarita. There is little history of prostitution on the island until, presumably, the initiation of the freeport. Some informants told me of going to "*visitar las putas*" (visit the whores) in Porlamar in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but the consensus is that prostitution in Isla Margarita existed on a small scale and was very low-key until recently. It appeared to me to be rapidly expanding in the years of 1993 and 1994; before that I noted no ads of the above-mentioned type in any local newspapers. This increase in prostitution may be linked to several events. One is the large increase in the number of illegal casinos and gambling houses in Porlamar and Juan Griego ¹⁰. There are numerous large casinos now in Porlamar, and they are jam-packed every night. If prostitution is linked to these establishments it is of the type that is well-concealed and may fit more the description of "call girl" and not "streetwalker." The obvious practice of sex for sale is where the women are employed in the smaller slot-machine houses located on the side streets of Porlamar and Juan Griego. The women stand invitingly in the doorways,

¹⁰ Casinos and other gambling establishments, outside of horseracing and innumerable lotteries, are officially illegal by the Venezuelan Constitution. However, this law is not enforced at all on the island, and when I left was the topic of much debate about corruption, the Mob, and dirty politics.

beckoning passerby to enter. It is common knowledge that along with betting a man may "get lucky" in another way.

There has been little outcry against prostitution on Isla Margarita; when the practice is discussed it is done so about what occurs in the really large cities, such as Caracas. One incident sticks in my mind however. In 1994 the national press ran a series of stories about how Canadian men were recruiting young Venezuelan women to work in "entertainment establishments" in Canada. When these operations were investigated, they were found to be a thinly veiled cover for entrapment and forced prostitution of women from various Latin American and Caribbean countries. At the same time these articles were running in the national press, the island's largest newspaper, *El Sol de Margarita*, was running advertisements for women to travel to Canada, work in the "exciting world of entertainment, and earn in dollars. . . ."

A last note: the increasing practice of sex tourism is now haunted by the growing prevalence of the HIV virus. Venezuela as a whole has no reliable statistics on the number of people infected with the virus, but what statistics are available show that the highest incidence of infection is concentrated in Puerto La Cruz, a resort town on the coast across from Isla Margarita, and in Porlamar. Because the culture in Venezuela emphasizes the value of the macho male, safer sexual practices such as the use of a condom are not common at all. Most men laughed themselves silly when I asked if they used condoms when they had sex with a new partner. As such, one can predict that as Isla Margarita continues to pursue the international tourist market to make up for the loss of income brought by the national tourist, the problems of sex tourism will cease to be only a question of abandoned morals, but one impacting the health of the nation.

CHAPTER 9 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion

The Margariteños can be said to be, in the majority, practicing Roman Catholics, but this statement must be qualified by knowledge of the actual day to day religious practice and by understanding the strong influence that African traditions have had on religious beliefs. The key concepts in understanding the island's form(s) of religion are Catholicism, syncretism, *brujeria* , or witchcraft, and last but not least, the Virgen del Valle.

Because Orona (1968) does such an excellent job of describing what religion is on Isla de Margarita, at least what it means and how it is practiced among the middle to lower class islanders, I will not go into much detail here. I would only like to highlight some areas of religion that are important in looking at change in the social structure and the belief system of Margariteños.

Margariteños are a religious people yet they are not as concerned with the formal practice of Catholicism in general. Still, religion permeates their lives, or at least it still does to those who remain traditional Margariteños. As I will show towards the end of this section, changes have occurred that are making religious belief less important than it was before the freeport.

Orona (1968:184-85) describes the role of religion in an islander's life as this:

Religion pervades the lives of the people to the extent that one does not consciously differentiate religion from other areas in one's life. It

is as natural as the sea around one. One is not made up of certain parts, such as religion, economics, politics, etc., which are separate and distinct in one's life; rather one's nature is the combination of all these elements ...Catholicism is a deep and integrated part of the Weltanschauung of the fishermen.

Religion is of utmost importance to more traditional Margariteños, and guides their philosophy of life, and explains why certain things happen or do not (a favorite expression used in all sorts of situations is "si Dios quiere...," (If God so wants it...)). Yet because there is no strict practice of what might be considered the very tenets of the Catholic Church, I have determined that in most cases Catholicism on Isla Margarita is characterized by nominal adherence to the faith.

Church attendance is typically low, and those who attend regularly are the elderly women, who seemingly by default are responsible for carrying on the religious traditions. They attend the masses and care for the church, particularly caring for the saints' images. The elderly women are also usually responsible for seeing that the young children receive the proper religious instruction so that they may complete their communions. The absence of a priest does not hinder the performance of religious rituals. Neither Punta de Piedras nor La Galera have a resident priest. In La Galera there was one woman who led the prayers if there was to be a small mass, and she was also the one to lead the recitation of the novena at the *rezo* for the dead. In Punta de Piedras, there was one priest who served several communities. He was the first priest that the town had in years and seemed fairly well liked. In the past there was much conflict with the priests, mostly because each one wanted to ban or change certain fundamental practices that were very important to the townspeople, such as the household baptism of *poniendo el agua*.

Men do not typically go to church, either for mass or even for a formal ceremony such as a communion celebration. If the men do go, they will rarely enter into the main body of the church, but rather gather in the very back, or stand outside quietly. The only time when this changes is if someone dies and a man was close to the dead either through friendship or kinship. Then he will sit close to the front of the church for the whole service. A man who does attend church is considered to be effeminate and probably homosexual. This has not changed from the time Orona did his fieldwork in the 1960s. He notes the same absence of men in all religious gatherings and celebrations. To me it seemed as if men only turned out in great numbers at large religious festivals such as that of the Virgen del Valle, where there was an opportunity for the men to engage in activities not strictly religious, such as drinking and playing cards or dominos. This is also true at the event called a *rezo*, which is held when someone dies.

The *rezo*, beginning on the first night of the death, lasts now about nine days ¹. The first night is an all-night wake, where people come and go, but the immediate family stays up all night. The funeral is held the next day, usually in the afternoon when the heat of the day has diminished somewhat. That evening is the time for the family of the dead to rest and sleep. The next night begins the *rezo*, usually at about seven PM. Friends of the family gather together at the house of the deceased. The women will go inside and sit, usually upon chairs provided by the funeral home, and recite a novena. While they recite, the men and youngest children remain sitting outside, often at tables, and playing dominos. These sometimes become famous domino matches, and since the prayer recitation will last nine nights,

¹ In days past, the *rezo* often lasted up to a month. This was explained to me as a result of there not being "anything else to do," or that in the past there was more respect for the dead.

rematches are eagerly awaited. There are also story-telling "competitions" (competition in the sense that while not spoken, the storytellers do try to outdo one another). Often the stories will center around the deceased, and so this is a form of honoring the dead. After the women are finished reciting their prayers, refreshments are served, usually hot chocolate and in some cases rum or brandy is served. The guests mingle and then go home around 10:30 or 11 PM.

This event, while not purely religious, serves the purpose of solidifying the community and the family by reuniting those who may not always see each frequently. It is also a way for the family to not be alone after losing a loved one. There is less chance for the bereaved to fall into a deep depression, or be overwhelmed with tasks that must be done after someone has died. In the past, before the freeport, the rezo was one of the only forms of "entertainment" available to young people, and one of the few socially sanctioned ways for young men and women to be together to flirt and interact with the opposite sex. As such, some large rezos are remembered fondly as great get-togethers by those Margariteños now at middle-age. Today, people still attend a rezo as faithfully as before, but there is less commitment to going for all nine nights or staying very late. The new places to meet friends and member of the opposite sex are the discotheques and bars in Porlamar. There is also the ubiquitous telenovela with which to keep up to date.

Each town of any size will have at least a *capilla* , or chapel. The building of the chapel signifies that the town has permanence, and has a soul and meaning for the residents. One of the greatest political acts a governor or town leader can do is to either build a new chapel for a pueblo that was lacking one, or make available funds for renovating an existing chapel or church. Many towns count their founding from the day that their church was

built. Private individuals may also donate the land for the chapel or church, and may also give the money for the construction of the building and maintenance thereafter. This assures the individual an unforgettable place in the town's collective memory, and earns them a great deal of prestige.

In Las Marvales there was a woman who gave part of her lands so that a chapel would be erected in Las Cuicas (actually a part of Las Marvales). It is a small chapel, and usually locked up except during the saint's festival time and other special times, such as the *velorios* for the *Cruz de Mayo*. Even though this woman was disliked in general for being, so it was said, land-greedy and stingy, at the same time her act of building a chapel earned her enough respect for people to forgive her bad qualities.

Until the coming of the freeport, it appears that religion played perhaps a stronger role in social cohesion and function. But regardless of the new commercialism, religion still guides much of the calendar of the island, although some of the past religious holidays now have more of a secular bent to them than they did twenty-five years ago. Margariteños used to joke that of all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, they had everyone else beat when it came to the amount of days set aside for holidays. At times, to me at least, this seemed true. The majority of these holidays are religious in orientation.

First, each town has its own patron saint or saintess. Because each religious figure has its own day when they are honored according to the Catholic Church, each town will have a festival for its saint's day. Some towns will have more than one, such as in Punta de Piedras where both the *Vírgenes de Mercedes* and *Cármén* were honored ². The entire fiesta lasts up

² These festivals are organized and maintained by organizations that Orona (1968: 213) describes as *cofradías*, run mostly by women and operative throughout the year. Their main

to a week, closing down most businesses in the pueblo and bringing home fishermen who have been out fishing off the island. The bigger the town the bigger the festival. One would expect that Porlamar would have the most extravagant festival but it does not. The two most popular and sacred of all the festivals are those of the Sacred Christ of Pampatar and that of the Virgen del Valle. It is the latter, the festival "del Valle" that is extraordinary, in terms of money expended, number of attendants and place in the folklore and self conception of the Margariteño, indeed, in the mind of any Venezuelan.

The Virgen del Valle

To begin to describe the Virgen del Valle of Isla Margarita is to try to describe something both material and also intangible. The Virgin is one of the first cultural symbols one is introduced to when arriving on the island. The introduction though will probably be informal: noticing her picture literally everywhere (usually of the virgin standing on or over a rendition of Isla Margarita), from the dashboards of the taxicabs and por puestos, to the duty-free stores bearing her name, to women who have the name "Delvalle." In one's conversations with "la gente," the phrase "con la Virgen del Valle..." (with the Virgin of the Valley...) is uttered frequently, meaning that with her help anything is possible. She is an ever-present force in the daily lives of all Margariteños, rich or poor, young or old. If anything has benefited from the coming of freeport, it may be said that her festival has reaped something quite positive from modernization: Her church is now richer and more adorned, and her festival more grand than ever.

purpose is to gather money to sponsor the virgins' fiestas. Although Orona names four *cofradías*, by 1992 I was only aware that two were still functioning in a noticeable manner.

The image of the Virgen dates back to the time when the Spanish were settled on Cubagua. Various are the stories of her beginnings on the islands, and dates are unsure. At sometime in either the late 1400s or very early 1500s, the image (statue) of the Virgin Mary was brought from Spain to Cubagua. This statue has been carved of wood, painted and dressed in fine robes and jewels. The virgin stands about one meter high, has a almost a Mona Lisa-like smile, long dark brown hair and white skin. She is, compared to other holy images I have seen, friendly and earthly looking, not possessing any sign of being long-suffering. She is a happy virgin.

According to Carlos Romero Moreno, quoted in the magazine *Margarita en tus Manos*, this virgin is the oldest one in existence in the Americas. Romero also dates her placement in the Valle de Espiritu Santo to about 1510. At this time Cubagua and Margarita were experiencing numerous pirate attacks and looting, and it is presumed that the image was moved to the safer surroundings of the inland valley of Isla Margarita. Later, in the 1550s and into the next decade, attacks on the island became so fierce that those living in what was to later become Porlamar fled to the hills and mountains, to the Valle and into what it now the state capital of La Asunción. At this time the Virgin began to acquire her fame for miracles: during all the attacks and subsequent looting, no one ever succeeded in capturing her image or her riches.

When the populace moved to La Asunción, the virgin was left behind in her chapel and primarily in the care of the Guayqueri Indians and the African slaves who cared for the haciendas. While there was no priest in attendance regularly at El Valle, there was a small but devoted following that kept her cult alive and made sure her festival, which now begins on September 7, was observed. Since 1585 there has been a priest in residence at

El Valle. The site of the church has not changed since the sixteenth century, and a larger church replaced the chapel in 1733. The existing church, a seashell pink color with white spires, was built around the turn of this century supposedly by a man who could neither read, write or do arithmetic.

Orona (1968: 203) explains Margariteños strong self identity as due, in part, to their strong belief in the Virgen del Valle:

The history of Margarita Island is formed by four ingredients: the sea, pearls, battles, and the Virgen. All are interwoven to make up the historical fabric of the island. The sea represents the environmental component of which yielded pearls, gave the people a livelihood, and permitted easy access for marauders. Pearls gave the island economic worth and attracted people. The battles represent the military component in which the people had to develop an internal organization to protect themselves from the marauders and later the Royalist forces of General Pablo Morillo. From this the Margariteños developed a strong sense of patriotism for their island. And the Virgen developed a strong cult of worship. She became the patroness whose spiritual powers help the people in times of distress.

The recounting of miracles performed by the Virgen is common ground even in routine conversations. She has supposedly caused the rain to fall during times of great drought, and protected the islanders in their fierce battles against much larger royalist forces. It was another miracle when Juan Bautista de Arismendi, who led the Margariteños against the Spanish in the Battle of Matasiete, was shot in the chest but survived, unwounded. He had led a public prayer to the Virgen for victory before the battle, and carried with him a smaller version of the Virgen. The bullet hit the image, but not him. The bullet was covered in gold and is now in the church's museum.

There are others, but some of the most interesting to me are the accounts of personal miracles. My favorite is the story of Domingo, the pearl fisherman, who was (depending on the version) either bitten by a shark or

stung by a large man-o-war. Either way, his leg wound festered, and he was told by doctors that there was no hope: his leg needed to be amputated the following morning. Losing his leg would mean an end to his profession, and his family would be left destitute. He and his wife Juana then prayed to the Virgen del Valle to save his leg, and promised to give her the biggest and most beautiful pearl that Domingo could find when he dove again. The next morning Domingo awoke, and his leg was no longer infected, in fact, it healed quickly and he soon went diving again. When he did he discovered a very large oyster, which he brought home to open. Upon doing so, he found inside a large and perfect pearl, in the shape of a human leg. This pearl also sits in the church's museum.

In fact, the museum has had to make plans to expand because the amount of gifts testifying to miracles can no longer be suitably housed. There are all kinds of jewels and fine watches, and special silver and gold "relics" people have had made to honor miracles received. Their are also innumerable sports trophies from individuals and teams, crutches and wheelchairs, pictures of mothers, daughters, sons, fathers, grandparents...if it can be imagined there is probably one of them at the church's reliquary.

The festival of the Virgen del Valle is one of the largest and best attended in all of Venezuela (See Crandon-Malamud 1993 for a different interpretation of religious festivals in Latin America). Venezuelans return from all over the world to fulfill their *promesas* to the Virgen. One man who owned a racehorse farm in Kentucky, in the United States, had returned to thank the Virgen for helping him to produce so many winning horses. Attendants come from all over Venezuela also, and the ferry boats and airplanes are packed with people. Hotels are full, as are the restaurants and beaches. The festival is festive, and is a time to celebrate life and its

beneficence. This celebration translates into an economic windfall for everyone involved in any way with the selling of goods and services on the island.

The fishermen benefit because there is more demand for their product and prices rise accordingly. Those who work in transportation on the island work extra hours to handle the extra customers and so increase their income. Obviously, the hotels and others business traditionally linked to tourism reap the benefits of this religious celebration. Even the old women frying empanadas de cazón on the street corners make more in one day than they might make in a month in the off-season. And while other "seasons" may be good, they are subject to the economic woes of the country. But the festival of the Virgen del Valle is like a calling, something one can and should make an extra effort to attend because it has the form of a religious pilgrimage.

Because of this tremendous public response to the Virgen del Valle, I was lead to question islanders about the Catholic trinity and how all this worked in to the cult of the Virgen del Valle. To the best of my knowledge, and from what Orona also determined, Margariteños believe first in the omnipotence of *Dios* , then in the Virgen Mary and Jesus Christ, then in the various saints. Still, I was told various times, sometimes in tones of exasperation, "Don't you see? They are all God, just in different manifestations." I would say, "Well, yes, but there is the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...where does that leave the Virgen?" This question was taken as an affront to the Virgen del Valle, and I was answered thus, "The Virgen is the Mother of Christ, the Mother of God. She is God..."

Again, I am sure this is not the official version of the Catholic Church, but it is the one that exists among those of the Isla.

So there is God, Jesus Christ, and the Christ Child (celebrated at Christmas time and more worshipped in other areas of Venezuela), the Virgen del Valle, the other virgins of the island, and then there are the saints. When one begins to deal with trying to understand the saints, one is faced with a problem far too complex for this thesis. The important issue here is to note how the issue of religious syncretism has been played out on the island. This will be discussed in the following section. Here I want to first discuss the festival of the Virgen del Valle, and how it serves a purpose of revitalization of the Margariteño community.

In most of Venezuela, and on Isla Margarita, the traditional Catholic saints have their place in the churches, but they are also used and present in the less well known practice of *brujeria*, here loosely translated as witchcraft. The *brujos/as*³ employ their power along with the various powers of the saints and God in order to either cure ill (*curanderos*), contact spirits (*espiritistas*) or cast spells (*brujos, brujeria*). As Orona (1968:223), one person may have all these powers⁴, or may possess ability in just one area. I see *brujeria* and curing as a syncretic effect of the religion of the Catholic church and older African and Indian traditions that were present at the time of the conquest. They have survived through the years in all of Venezuela, with some coastal areas known as more powerful than other regions in matters of witchcraft, etc. There is still, on Isla Margarita, common use of native plants for curing illness, probably much them medically valid in Western medicine.

³ Brujos may be male or female. On the island there were almost equal numbers of older men and women versed in supernatural powers.

⁴ Orona also discusses the *mal de ojo*, or evil eye. While this may be deliberately cast on a person, it can also affect babies who have little strength to resist an adult's power. A person may have unknown powers, and just by looking at a baby may innocently cast the evil eye on the child. For this reason, all babies, rich and poor, wear a special bracelet or anklet that protects them from receiving the evil eye.

People who are ill will first try home remedies, that is, the traditional medicines such as herbal teas and poultices. If that does not work, they will consult a regular doctor in a clinic or the public hospitals in Porlamar or Juan Griego. If they are still experiencing problems, they will repair to a traditional healer, a brujo, somewhere on the island. Usually a person will use a combination of these alternatives in pursuing a cure for what ails them. In some cases, a person is sure from the start that their illness is spirit-induced and then they will go directly to the brujo. Brujos are also consulted for matters concerning missing persons or continual bad luck in business and one's love life.

One saint in particular deserves mention here, although there are many, many more saints called upon to help the brujo/curandero. This Señor Gregorio Hernandez, a doctor who lived and practiced in Caracas in the mid-1800s. He is known for his good and untiring dedication to the poor, and for having effected numerous miraculous cures. People have made his gravesite in Caracas a religious shrine. Every so often a story will come out of another miraculous cure attributed to el Señor Gregorio: the paralyzed who suddenly walk after praying to him, or the case of a child's dying of a strange form of cancer that suddenly retreats. Even doctors versed in western medicine admit to San Gregorio's miraculous interventions ⁵

There are also people called "women of blessing," or *La Señora de Santiguar*. These are women who have the ability to bless and remove the evil eye. One my daughter had a fever that lasted days. Just as I was ready to return to the doctor, my friends suggested I take her to the Señora de Santiguar because, they reasoned, her fever might have been the result of the

⁵ Gregorio Hernandez was recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church in 198...

mal de ojo. Fortunately for my daughter but not for my research, her fever abated and further action was not necessary.

Brujeria is not discussed lightly, as anyone could have these powers and could use them against another person. In fact, such things were not mentioned much to me at all during my first months of fieldwork, not until, I think, more trust was vested in me.

There were various times when things that happened to me and others were explained as the result of witchcraft. I was in a car accident and this was explained as the result of someone casting a spell on me. That I was not killed was seen as intervention by the Virgen del Valle and possibly the power of another brujo who was my friend. After the accident I was made to bathe with *agua de mango*, made by boiling leaves from the mango tree. This was both to cleanse me and heal bruises. The water is also drunk as a tea to help heal and cleanse. Later a curandero massaged my feet and back and in doing so said he was removing the remains of the sorcery that had been cast upon me.

Through all the change and social upheaval caused by the shifting economies and changing moral environment brought on by the freeport and tourism, brujeria and faith in God and the Virgen del Valle seems very strong still in the 1990s. It is, perhaps, just as strong if not stronger, than it was 25 years ago. I believe that in the years following the implementation of the new commercial regime and through the boom years until the early 1980s, both religious faith, but in particular, belief in the power of brujeria lagged. There was too much money to not go to doctors, or buy subsidized medicine at the pharmacy. When the economy began to be reformulated at the national level, implementing the neoliberal policies set forth by then-president Carlos Andrés Pérez, I believe that religious faith and use of

brujeria was returned to more and more. This occurred not just on Isla Margarita but all over Venezuela. By 1994 when inflation had hit sixty to ninety percent, the amount of religious programming on television had increased. The stores in Porlamar selling religious amulets and other items to increase power and protect the bearer claimed to be doing a better business. Attendance at the festival of the Virgen del Valle, in 1993, was supposedly at an all-time high. One can see, as Malinowski explained, that people use religion as a way to explain and fight off that which is frightening and problematic in their life. This is no less the case in Isla Margarita.

Political Life

Politics in Venezuela has lost much respect by the masses of people in the last five or six years. While some disillusionment may have been present before, it was the end of President Lusinchi's term in the late 1980s that could be considered the beginning of the end. With Lusinchi came grand tales of corruption, of misappropriation and misuse of federal moneys for personal enrichment. It was also a time of decreasing income for the middle class Venezuelan, and there was a yearning for the "good old days" when government subsidies flowed like water and everyone could drink Chivas Regal ® scotch whiskey and wear Guess ® blue jeans. Carlos Andrés Pérez was elected for the second time because many people believed he stood for the return to those heady and happy days.

But Venezuela was in for a shock. Shortly after coming to office, the president began to implement plans to try to lift Venezuela out of a serious debt crisis. To do this, government subsidies were to cut, not increased, and government-owned businesses would be privatized. One measure taken led to disaster: bus fares, set by the government, were increased in Caracas. This

led to the riots of February 27, 1989, where, depending on who is consulted, 300 to over 2,000 people were killed or "disappeared." Such a volatile response was a horrible shock to the country, and also to the international financial market. Investors became jumpy, and it was the beginning of the end. Confidence in the government dropped to a low rate, and cynicism soared. When I arrived in Caracas in April of 1989, things were still unsettled, and numerous protest shutdowns of the city kept me in the capital far longer than I wished.

But on Isla Margarita life seemed to continue as usual. The tourists still came, at least those from the rest of Venezuela. The economy had not yet crashed enough to dent the national tourism market. There was only a slight dip in the amount of international tourists that visited the island, and their numbers rebounded by the following years.

But on February 27, 1992, a far greater event than February 27, 1989 occurred. There was a military coup attempt led by Colonel Hugo Chávez, and literally all hell broke loose in Caracas, the capital, and Maracaibo, the oil-producing capital of the nation. The military-led movement, the Bolivariano 2000, commanded almost spontaneously a great following among the disaffected public. While people did not want a return to a military dictatorship such as that in place up until the 1960s, they were disgusted by the amount of corruption and lack of moral and economic leadership in both national and local politics. People were listening to Chávez, and they seemed to like what they heard, a message of cleaning out the corrupt. This feeling was sweeping through South America, from Fujimori and his *autogolpe* (or in common parlance, a *Fujimorazo*), to the throwing out of Brazil's Collor Mello on corruption charges.

The government responded to increasing street protests with increasing police brutality and repression of free speech. Entire runs of daily newspapers were confiscated by the government's secret service, and some newspaper editors left the country claiming to be in fear of their life. By November of 1992, things were not good, but they were calmer. Regional elections were to happen in December, and people seemed to focus their political energy on working for the candidate of their choice. There was still an optimism that the country would pull through the crisis without major scars. Then, early in the morning of November 27, the same group of military officers again attempted to overthrow the government of CAP, this time by seizing one of the national television stations and broadcasting throughout the land for nearly five hours. It was a bloody battle in the streets of Caracas and the other large cities of the country.

But on Isla Margarita, things remained calm. While newspaper delivery was interrupted for days, the television was watched intently. Martial law and a curfew was imposed, but there were few violations. People went about their business, and the only worries expressed were of two kinds: concern for family living in the larger, politically disturbed cities, and the very serious worry that with this incident occurring so close to the Christmas season, businesses on the island would be impacted severely by a drop in the amount of national and international visitors.

Another important concern was for the election of governor of the state of Nueva Esparta. There were basically only two candidates, the incumbent governor of the party Acción Democrática, and that of the main opposition party, the social Christian party of COPEI. The campaign seemed to represent two opposing views. The incumbent governor, Morel Rodríguez, was a well-known promoter of large-scale tourism projects and

saw the future of the island in terms of more intense and widespread development of the island's resources by tourism concerns. His detractors claimed he would sell the island at any price and that he had little respect for preserving Isla Margarita's traditions. They also claimed that he was guilty of taking money from developers, and that he cared little if the average Margariteño had a decent quality of life. The opposition also believed that the problem of water shortages were much the fault of the Rodriguez government in that he had not taken a more proactive stance in resolving the problems.

The opponent, Rafael "Fucho" Tovar, was a longtime state senator to the national congress and developer and owner of the ferry service, Conferry, in Punta de Piedras. He portrayed himself as more a man of the people, concerned with their problems and their traditions. He often bemoaned the pitfalls of the freeport and the unregulated tourism that had followed. He once went on record as saying that the entire freeport system should be repealed. The opposition claimed that Fucho was an old man (while using the popular symbol of a young fighting cock for Morel Rodriguez, and using a lot of humorous sexual innuendo) that would bring financial ruin to the island.

The elections were finally held in early December of 1992. People in the streets seemed to think that Tovar would win easily because Rodriguez was too closely associated with the now-despised president, CAP. However, by the eve of election day, Rodriguez's people were proclaiming him a winner. Alarm went off among the population and the call of "fraud!" went out. Hundreds of angry voters converged on the election return headquarters in La Asunción, and the National Guard was put in place to prevent violence. A complete recount was called, and numerous inconsistencies, such as long

dead islanders were found to have voted. The case was presented to the Supreme Court of Venezuela. In the meantime, one of Rodriguez's political assistants was put in place as interim governor; it was understood he was just a puppet for Rodriguez.

There was at first a general feeling of demoralization by many on the island. They claimed that all politics were dirty, and that should there be another election to decide the "true" winner, they would not vote that time. Their attitude was that there was no way to make their voice heard, and that politicians, and by implication, the rich, will do whatever suits them and damn the consequences.

Another election was held based on the judgment that the first election was marked by numerous cases of fraud. But by the time this was done, people had lost interest in the cause, and voter turnout was extremely low. Morel Rodriguez was declared the winner, and life went on.

Meanwhile, the situation at the national level had not improved but had worsened. There was talk of impeachment for CAP on charges of diverting moneys to pay for redecoration of his mistress's New York apartment and sending funds to Violeta Chamorro in Nicaragua to help with her re-election bid. CAP was finally removed from office, and has since been sentenced to prison. The amount of emotion this national fiasco generated was incredible, and discussing politics became the new national pastime. Everyone had a new story every day about who did what corrupt act and got away with it. In this climate, Rafael Caldera launched his bid for the presidency, abandoned his traditional party, and formed a coalition of small parties. This coalition was known by Venezuelans as the "chiripas," a type of very small cockroach that no household seems to ever escape, or be able to

exterminate because there are so many ⁶. Caldera won the election, and people all over seemed to settle down to wait for all the good things to start happening again.

Unfortunately, the damage of Venezuela's political and economic structures was too profound to fixed by one man in a very short time. Venezuela's economic woes became painfully evident, and the question on Isla Margarita of whether or not to continue down the path of tourism and freeport commercialism may no longer be a choice. If the economy continues it's downward spiral, and the level of national discontent continues its ascent, there may be only the answer of a revolution.

⁶ It was a bizarre sight when Caldera won the election: thousands of people wearing bouncy wire antennae in imitation of little cockroaches filled the streets of Caracas.

CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

Venezuela is in horrible financial shape. Inflation runs between 30--60%. People are demoralized, going door to door looking for work. Eating spaghetti noodles with a pig's ear thrown in for flavoring. But corruption still flourishes. The gap between rich and poor grows more immense.

Margarita itself is hot, dusty, dry and brown. Papers and old plastic bags blow about and come to rest against my shins as I wait for Omar. I bend down and peel them off my skin, tossing them away, and thinking, milk is almost too expensive to buy.

From the Author's Field notes, June 20, 1994

This work has analyzed the changes that have occurred on a small Venezuelan island, Isla Margarita, since the implementation of a new economic regime: a free port and its linked economy of national and international tourism. These changes began occurring in the early 1970s, and with the official opening of the tariff-free system in 1975, the floodgates of a new world overtook the erstwhile provincial Isla Margarita. What was once an homogenous culture, with variations existing at superficial levels only, has become a stratified society, crosscut by lines of wealth distinctions and class consciousness. There is now a sort of cultural chaos that reigns on the island. This chaos does not exist in a vacuum of time or space, but is an outgrowth of first the "boom" in the national economy, and later, the economic "crisis" that now grips Venezuela, and indeed, many developing nations in the world today.

Although the creation of the free port was intended to alleviate the impoverished living conditions of the Margariteños, its success has been

unevenly, or unequally, spread among the island's population. It is but a veneer of modernity that has been cast over Isla Margarita. The unevenness has been exacerbated by the both the traditional class structure found in Venezuela and the worsening state of the national economy. Being an island, Isla Margarita can do little but to react to the events pummeling it from without. These very reactions are in many cases what has intensified the cultural heterogeneity of the island and crystalized the differences in each classes accessibility to wealth.

Tourism is notoriously susceptible to the boom and bust cycles of the global and national economies of which it is but a part. Lawless (1992) notes that after the publicity generated about stories of the HIV virus and Haiti in the 1980s, tourism was effectively wiped out on that island. The "death blow" was dealt in 1991 to Haitian tourism by the issuance of a travel warning by the United States government (1992:27).

Political violence, as outlined by Hall (1994), can have extremely detrimental effects on a nation's or area's tourism industry. As tourism has expanded to every nook and cranny of the the Earth, every violent political clash has also taken it's toll on the local tourism industries, from Yugoslavia, India, Korea, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe. In Jamaica, social unrest cost the tourist trade dearly, and more recently the peasant uprising in Chiapas, Mexico surely caused a downturn in the number of foreign visitors to that country. In the case of Venezuela, the most recent events of political and economic instability have sent the nation's "tourism czars" scrambling to downplay the significance of the social unrest.

How have national and economic events impacted on the island of Margarita? A brief history, albeit simplistic, will illustrate that the economy of

Isla Margarita is very much a dependent one, both on the global economy, and then how that arena is played out in the country's policies as a whole.

First, the freeport was begun under optimal economic conditions in Venezuela : the oil market had high prices, and money flowed into the country. Per capita income was at an all time high in 1977. Venezuela was known as Little Saudi Arabia, and foreigners found it hard to afford to be even to travel there on business, much less tourism. So the island catered at first to national visitors who came to buy in the free port stores, and to some scattering of other South American and Caribbean tourists, along with the occasional European visitor. The result was that all islanders profited at this time, it was, as I called it in Chapter 4, the Days of Chivas and Sony. Unfortunately, things would not be as good again for a very long time.

In February of 1983, the dream crashed, the bolívar devalued from four per dollar to eight overnite, and the country was beset by dire questions of how to deal with the same debt crisis plaguing most other Third World countries. The countries overall poverty rate stood at about 25% in 1980, but by 1989 it had risen to around 40%. In 1977 the price of a barrel of oil on the world market was going for about 15-16 US Dollars. Right before the drop, it had increased in value to around \$40 US for a high, with \$25 being an average. The worst drop in price would come in 1985, when the price per barrel went for 25.9 dollars to 12.8 dollars. In Margarita, the impact was felt in an abrupt decline in the national tourist trade. The effects of the collapsed economy radiated out from the stores and hotels to all corners of the island. The good impacts of the freeport and national tourism were all of a sudden withdrawn. Not only did those in immediate linkages with the stores and hotels suffer, but the debilitated overall economy hurt those in other island economies, such as fishing.

In response, those in leadership positions in the freeport and still nascent tourism industry looked elsewhere for business, and found the Trindadians, Canadians and Europeans. However, the harsh fact struck home: the island had not built up a sufficient infrastructure to deal with new international tourists who would presumably stay on the island longer than a short weekend, as did many of the national tourists. The lack of capital to expand tourism-oriented growth was due to the fact that much of this money, if not most, had to come from the federal government. Because of the contracting national economy, such funds were hard to come by. So the efforts to improve services, etc. were limited by necessity limited, and what was available went to the area of the eastern shore, primarily Porlamar. This served to increase the real and perceived poverty of those who lived outside the metropolitan area.

1989 marks another commonly agreed upon turning point in Venezuelan history (Goodman, et al. 1995). The now infamous *paquete* is set in place by the president, Carlos Andres Pérez, which when implemented, leads to severe rioting in Caracas and elsewhere. Images of bloodied Venezuelans are flashed on the news around the world, and as expected, there is another downturn in the number of national visitors to Isla Margarita. But by this time, there was also a growing number of international tourists beginning to visit the island, and the social upheavals turn away this new flow. The economy on the island is contracting due to both a slacking off of the tourist trade and the impacts of economic adjustments set off by the *paquete*. Inflation is the number one problem for the middle and lower classes, and people look for ways to cope with their shrinking paychecks and rising prices.

1992 sees two attempted coups on the federal government, and a great increase in people's pessimism in the ability of the federal or local government to improve the situation. Strikes for higher wages, especially among hospital workers and public school teachers become frequent, leading to more of a drop in the quality of life. One example was the public hospital in Porlamar in late July of 1992. I was taken there after being in a car accident, and was made to wait to see a doctor for more than four hours, and the doctor I did see had been working for more than 24 hours without rest because there was no one to relieve here. The hospital in general was neglected by the government; in 1993 I was appalled to find on one working toilet on the maternity floor which had close to one hundred women, and for most of the time I was there, the water was off more than on.

1993 was also a year of difficulties for the nation and Isla Margarita. There was the political crisis which forced the president out of office on charges of misusing public funds, another scandal that had the interim president signing the prison release papers of a notorious member of the Colombian cocaine cartels, and the financial collapse of the nation's second largest bank, Banco Latino. Overnight, millions of Venezuelans lost every bolívar they had in the bank. Banco Latino was only the first bank in a long series of other financial institutions' collapses, mostly due to corrupt loan-lending practices.

1994 brought a new president into power, Rafael Caldera, swept in by a new coalition of small parties jokingly called Las Chiripas. I noted that almost everyone on the island was filled with new hope that economically at least, things would get better. The reality was worse than they or I could have imagined. The bolívar was struck by more devaluations, exchange controls were implemented to stem the flight of dollars from the country. This was a

strong blow for the freeport and tourism: with the exchange market closed down, tourists could not change their money, and so they left the island, and more were reluctant to come back until the situation had calmed down. the stores were in terrible shape because they could no longer freely import foreign goods, the mainstay of their business, because they could not obtain enough dollars. From the summer of 1994 to April 22, 1996, the foreign exchange market was completely controlled, and dollars were so hard to come by that some airlines (American Airlines, for one) had threatened to stop flying to Venezuela because it could not change the bolívares earned to dollars.

Thus, by 1994 the freeport and its associated economy of tourism, both international and national, was under great pressure. For better or worse, since the opening of the freeport in the mid-1970s, the freeport/tourism economy has come to dominate the island, and the islanders are now dependent on it for their overall well-being. To take this part of the island's economy away would do irreparable damage to not only the eastern shore, but to all Margariteños and their now varied cultural expressions.

One of the results of the freeport and tourism economies on the island is the creation of a greater amount of social stratification and cultural heterogeneity. One can see three Margaritas existing in the 1990s. They each exist in different dimensions of geographical space which happens to correspond to differences in culture. There are three cultural/geographic areas on the island itself, and they were produced by historical events and the nature of the island's terrain. First, there is the eastern shore, the most populous area of the island, with its commercial, touristic and spiritual centers of Porlamar, Pampatar, and the Valle del Espíritu Santo. Included here would also be the town of San Juan de Bautista. San Juan is at the border of the beginning of the second area, that which encompasses the lowland, arid

savanna running from southwest of the international airport to Punta de Piedras, then north to Boca del Río and over east again to La Guardia. This area has been dominated not by commerce, but by smuggling, and not by tourism, but by fishing.

Lastly, there is the Peninsula de Macanao, the most marginal area of the island, and the last to be incorporated into the development boom that began in the 1970s. It is the hope of many in the tourist industry that Macanao can become the site of carefully developed ecotourism. The Peninsula will be spared much further development (other than sunburnt European tourists speeding around in topless jeeps) until the infrastructural requirements, such as a steady water supply, are put in place. This primarily means laying the pipes for water and sewage, and as the island is facing such water shortages now, this may be a long time in coming.

These three areas are also distinguishable by their cultural expressions. First there are the eastern shore elites who are those possessing enough money and prestige to be the ones in power on Isla Margarita. This grouping is composed of island politicians, European immigrants in the tourism sector of economy, and other immigrant nationals, from primarily large cities of Caracas, Maracaibo, and Valencia plus a very, very few Margariteños, usually those who are doctors, engineers, lawyers and judges.

Second there is the middle class--now very small throughout Venezuela--composed of immigrants also, but also including a Middle Eastern component, the free port store owners, and those who have migrated more than 10 years ago, plus Margariteños working in the profession such as government workers, professors, and owners of private businesses.

Third, and last, are the lower classes, made up primarily of the "original" Margariteños: the fishermen, bodega owners, school teachers,

secretaries, free port store employess, etc. plus poor national immigrants, as I have discussed in the section on migration and the housing squeeze.

Because tourism has served to develop the island in this uneven way, causing more cultural and economic heterogeneity, I have chosen to see the current state of modernity as just a thin veneer. Only those elites who inhabit the eastern shore, including Porlamar, have become "modern" in both their thoughts and actions. The rest of the islanders have not yet swallowed the changes necessary to become "developed." This may be due to personal choice, or the path is barred for now because of the poor economic conditions existing in all of Venezuela. Is one "modern" when one owns a Sony 24-inch color television but does not have running water in one's house? Or is it modern to be against birth control and at the same time advocate death as the price to pay for being raped? Regardless of any indices that assume to measure a community's well-being, there is still the question to be answered: does modernity emanate from material possessions, a high standard of living, or a certain type of world view? I would advocate that it is a combination of all those things that makes one modern. In the case of Isla Margarita, the development of modernity has been uneven.

If the island continues on its prevailing path of reckless growth and helter-skelter "resortism," I can foresee nothing else but increased poverty, more marginalization of the poor, pollution of the fishing grounds and beaches, and in general an unsatisfactory level of existence by the majority of Margariteños. What might be a solution to such problems as I have written about? First, obviously, the national economy has a great impact on what occurs on the island. Islanders can not do much to influence either the global or national forces that define so much of their lives. But if those forces do soften, and the outcome is a better economy, or a strengthened one in some

form, then I would suggest that Margariteños begin by re-evaluating how they intend to best deal with an economy now so dependent on tourism.

Hall (1994:122) puts the issue succinctly:

If communities wish to gain the benefits of modernisation in the full knowledge of the potential difficulties it may create, then why should outsiders, often academics, aid agencies and conservation organizations, be in a position to criticise or prevent them from gaining their tourism development goals? The issue should therefore perhaps be more one of control over the development process rather than the process itself. . . ."

The commercialism and tourism evident on the island today will not go away, in fact, they will most likely spread to all reaches of the island. The impacts will continue to weigh negatively if the island's leaders and people refuse to design and implement a plan for growth that is more equitable for all of the island and that is focused on bettering the infrastructural system of the island, such as the water supply, sewage disposal, and transportation networks. If such a plan can be brought out, and then put to work with the input of each community helping to decide and design its own plan for growth, then the shift to a primarily tourism-based economy may have been painful, but will have been worth it.

APPENDIX

In September, 1992 I began to test a brief interview form for the stores of Porlamar, the main commercial shopping area of the Free Port of Margarita Island. I had three broad questions in mind: 1) who owns these stores (hence, where does the profit go?); and, 2) who works in these stores? The common opinion on the island is that the free port's profits have not gone into the pockets of Margariteños as was the original intention of the regime's founders. Instead, the money has stayed primarily among immigrants from the Middle East, and more recently, among immigrants from mainland China. Another common belief is that much of the money earned in the free port was sent out of the country to help finance the liberation struggle of the Palestinians.

The question of who is employed in the stores would also be addressed in the survey. I had the feeling that the free port provided employment to women from around the entire island, not just Porlamar. For example, in San Francisco de Macanao, many of the women I spoke with worked in stores in Porlamar, even though it's more than an hour away by *por puesto* and even though Monk and Alexander (1986) claimed few Margariteños from areas other than Porlamar worked in the free port, mostly because transportation costs were seen to be prohibitively high. Also, Angel Gomez (1992), plus countless other 'older' islanders have claimed that "outsiders," mainly "Arabs," took over the free port, and then employed Margariteñas, exploiting them financially and sexually. This last point was never solidly

documented or denied in my research; only anecdotally would I be able to say that women employed in free port stores have had to deal with sexual harrassment. This is not an unusual conclusion, as women have had to face this problem in all cultures through time.

The third question to be addressed was who benefits from the free port? This can be a murky area, as it enters into unknown multiplier effects of tourism (national and international) and other areas that, for this study, are unmeasurable. But it was possible I would be able to say something about migration, male vs. female employment patterns and pay ranges, and sex discrimination.

I chose two streets on which to conduct this survey: Avenida Santiago Mariño, one of the most frequented by tourists and one of the most upscale judged by prices, quality and origin of goods sold, and Calle Igualdad, a mix between upper and middle and economy class stores, a main artery, and leading directly to the Plaza Bolívar at one end and Santiago Mariño at the other. I also conducted twelve store interviews on two main streets in Juan Griego to gauge any differences between the two largest free port sites.

Because I was alone, and each store took 1/2 to 3/4 of an hour to complete. The time depended on the number of employees with whom i could speak. By necessity and respect for the person's job, the survey was essentially opportunistic. If people took time to talk to me they may have been missing a chance at making a sale, hence a commission, hence food on their table. I got as many interviews as I could while trying not to interfere with the store's business.

Stores were chosen randomly by going to every fifth store on both sides of the selected streets. On Santiago Mariño, I began at the Avenida 4 de Mayo and continued to the Hotel Bella Vista. On the other side of the street I began

with the corner of Igualdad and Santiago Mariño and continued to the 4 de Mayo. The choice of every fifth store was arbitrary, but it is yielded a 20% sample on Santiago Mariño and 30% on Calle Igualdad. Approximately 30% of all stores employees were interviewed.

If a business was a bank, pharmacy, restaurant or offices, I skipped counting it and counted the very next store. I was refused an interview in only one case, and then I went to the very next store (the store sold imported firearms). The store types are varied enough to insure a decent to ensure randomness.

A total of 45 stores were surveyed in a random fashion in the towns of Porlamar and Juan Griego, giving a sample size of approximately two percent of all known free port stores on Isla Margarita. While it would have been desirable to have a larger sample size, this was impossible to handle by one person under the time constraints imposed.

**Replica of the
Interview Form for Freeport Stores,
Porlamar and Juan Griego**

Primera Parte:

Fecha:

Nº de Encuesta:

Sitio:

Empresa de:

Número de Empleados:

Cuántos años tiene esta empresa?

Los dueños son :

1) individuos

es/son: Margariteño/a

otro Venezolano/a

2) compañía/consortio

es: local regional nacional
 internacional

El/la gerente es :

Margariteño/a otro/a (de dónde?)

Extranjero/a (de dónde?)

Notas adicionales:

Segunda Parte

Nº de Encuesta:

Empleado/a Sexo: M F Edad:

Cuánto tiempo tiene trabajando aquí?

Trabajaba antes? no
 sí

dónde?

A que edad empezaba a trabajar?

Dónde nació? Margarita
Otro.....Cuándo vino a Margarita?

Dónde vive ahorita?

Tienes hijos? no sí cuántos?

Está casado/a? no		
	sí	trabaja su esposo/a? no
	sí	En que trabaja?

Hasta que año estudiaba?
todavía estudia

Cuántos personas ahorita viven en su casa?

De todos que viven allí, cuántos trabajan?

En que trabaja o trabajaba su papa?

Su mama trabaja o trabajaba? no
sí tipo de empleo:

Cuánto gana aquí mensual?

Recibe algunos beneficios?

* Finalmente, por favor, explicame porque trabaja? de necesidad? placer? los dos?

En su opinión, cuáles son los problemas mas graves o sérios que enfrenten la gente de Margarita?

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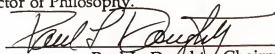
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kathi R. Kitner was born in Akron, Ohio, on November 9, 1958. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Kent State University in 1979, majoring in anthropology and Latin American studies. Until returning to graduate school at the University of Florida in 1983, she lived and worked in México, Honduras, California and Florida.

Her master's thesis focused on the fishing cooperatives of Isla Mujeres, México. Upon graduation in 1986, she went to work for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, researching the impact of various federal fishery management plans on southeastern United States fishermen.

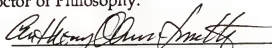
In 1989 she began work on her doctorate at the University of Florida. Receiving a Fulbright grant in 1992 to conduct research on tourism in Venezuela, she stayed in the field until August of 1994. Since returning to Gainesville, Florida, she has worked fulltime at the College of Law, Department of Student Affairs.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



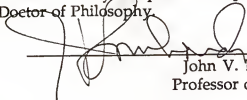
Paul L. Doughty, Chairman
Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology

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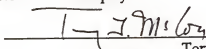
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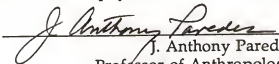
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Anthropology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May, 1996



Dean, Graduate School